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HUBERT FREETH'S PROSPERITY.

A STORY.

By Mrs. NEWTON CROSLAND,

Author of "Hildred the Daughter," "The Diamond Wedding," "Lydia," etc.

"Commend me to home joy,—the family board,
Altar, and hearth! These, with a brisk career,
A source of honest profit and good fame;
Just so much work as keeps the brain from rust;
Just so much play as lets the heart expand,
Honoring God and serving man,—I say
These are reality, and all else—fluff,
Nutshell, and naught."—Robert Browning.

PHILADELPHIA
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HUBERT FREETH'S PROSPERITY.

CHAPTER I.

HOW HE BROKE THE GOOD NEWS.

THE cosey little parlor in which Hubert Freeth and his wife were sitting would, I think, have been rich in suggestions to a painter of *genre* pictures. The season was early winter, and the weather clear and frosty, so the fire burned brightly, as if in cheery challenge to the keen dry air, and looked the more radiant because its darting tongues of flame were reflected in a highly-polished stove. Indeed, everything in the room bore the sheen of brightness and neatness, and testified to the careful supervision of a good housewife.

Curtains of dark-red cotton damask were drawn before the closed window-shutters; on one side of the fire a large leathern chair, showing on its elbows the signs of long service, permitted its occupant, the master of the house, to read his newspaper in an easy half-reclining attitude, while at the opposite corner of the table, with her open work-box at her side, sat Mrs. Freeth, diligently employed.

A page of copied music slanted up to dry; a boy's slate and school-books left upon the sideboard; and some children's toys, belonging to little folks now fast asleep, seemed



just the accessories which relieved an absolute prim orderliness that might otherwise have been a shade too rigid. Yet the gas-burner—one only of two or three being alight—shed its beams upon something still more infantile than toys and school-books, namely, a bassinet placed upon two chairs in a snug corner of the room, the six months' old darling which it contained looking like a rosebud, partly from baby Lucy's own natural hue of health, partly from the shadow of the pink and white drapery which ornamented her little cot.

At intervals all was so still that the ticking of a clock on the mantel-piece seemed musically beating the measure of the passing time; though every now and then the wife, between the clicks of her scissors, babbled of household matters, or the husband, beginning with a "Listen, Bessie," read aloud a paragraph from the *Times*, simplifying afterward politics and city news for his wife's edification.

Politics and city news were always important subjects to Hubert Freeth; but tonight they were of absorbing interest, and so linked themselves with the thoughts which were paramount in his mind, that he found them, by many degrees, the easiest newspaper intelligence to discuss. And yet he was not reading with his usual rapid assimilation and sharp attention. Many and many a paragraph on general topics which he perused left only a vague impression on his mind; and his wife was wholly unconscious how often his gaze turned sideways from the crackling paper to fall on herself.

As yet undistorted by hoops of steel, the outline of her pretty little figure was worth remarking; and once or twice, when she stood up, the more easily to achieve the cutting out of baby's scarlet cloak, the lines of her gray merino dress showed gracefully as she moved. She had a profile that would have been nearly Grecian had the lips been set to that type; but though her mouth was small, its curve was expressive of gentleness, and though mobile,

it never took the scornful shapeliness of the "Cupid's bow." Her blue eyes were what is understood by "dove-like;" and light but bright and silky hair was braided about a small but well-shaped head.

Hubert Freeth was a good-looking man of the type which generally leads captive gentle timid women; or, stay, is it not that men of strong wills and great practical abilities—qualities which write their hieroglyphics on the countenance—are commonly, and especially in their youth, themselves first and forcibly attracted by those soft feminine natures which seem like wax to mould, and, by love's teaching, "marble to retain?" Nearly six feet high, he was portly in proportion, and though barely forty, it was a mass of iron-gray hair which shadowed his broad full brow. Fine dark eyes, that could, on rare occasions, soften and glow in loving tenderness, shone beneath well-marked eyebrows, and gave to the face an expression of keen intelligence.

To those eyes were allied a rather aquiline nose, and a firmly rounded chin; but the softening feature of the face was the mouth, which, though well closed in repose, could curve easily into smiles, and reveal in hearty laughter a set of white and even teeth. But for all this capability of mirth or tenderness, Hubert Freeth was a man not only of strong will but of indomitable self-reliance, and not precisely what even a panegyrist would call a safe-tempered individual. It may be admitted that he had had much in his life to try his temper, and it had chafed under circumstances of tedious subordination, or rather that semi-subordination in which great responsibilities are accepted without a commensurate free will and authority. To his meek little wife, however, who never thwarted him, and was always ready to receive his will for law, he was habitually gentle, and, moreover, always ready to uphold her authority among the children, and be the support her more yielding nature required.

Behold, then, the pen-and-ink portraits of this wedded pair, after twenty years of married life! They had been what the worldly-wise call a rash young couple, who had rushed into matrimony at twenty and eighteen years old respectively, upon an income of a hundred and fifty pounds a year; mating as the birds do in the sweet spring season, and without much thought of the far-off autumn days. Their case had confounded the theories of the worldly-wise. It is true, the howl of the wolf had been heard very near their door, but then it was in the days when love was engaged in leading a choral concert of youth's bright hopes and expectations; so the howl was partially drowned, and busy Love stayed where he was, instead of flying out of the window. Little mouths came one after another, and gaped in the nest much as little birds gape for sustenance, and the parents had managed to satisfy them; and by and by the wolf was somehow appeased, and its howl grew fainter, and finally died away altogether.

And on that winter evening of which I am telling, Hubert Freeth leaned back in his easy chair, and often, when he seemed to be reading, he was looking over his newspaper with tender regard at his wife, and recalling successive scenes of their married life. After the first few years of hardship and struggle, every year had been one of steady advance; steady, but yet slow, for Hubert Freeth's position had been peculiar, and while in some respects what many people called fortunate, had yet very probably retarded the free development of his character and the full expansion of his powers.

The only nephew of a rich bachelor, he had been taken into his uncle's employment at an early age. Hubert had proved himself clever from the first, and he was indeed endowed with just that rare combination of faculties which is necessary to the civil engineer, in these days when his profession constitutes a mighty instrument of material power and progress. Nevertheless, old Thomas Freeth,

while profiting to the full by his nephew's talents and industry, had dealt with him parsimoniously, paying him for his labor at the mere market price of a far inferior assistant's salary or commission. It is true that from time to time this payment had been raised by the evidently increased value of his nephew's services, but the old man did not disdain to take advantage of the subtle invisible ties which bound Hubert, and hindered him from seeking other fields for his labors.

Thomas Freeth was a rich old man, with a name and a fame in the world; rich was he, and somewhat of a miser, yet capable of eccentric acts of generosity. But on these no one could safely calculate, for he was afflicted with a fitful and yet sullen temper, for which no exorcist had ever been found. Well was it understood by all his dependents that to offend him once was to offend him forever; and though perhaps he was little loved, there were a good many people from whom his apparently rigid truthfulness of character, his great business abilities and influential position, extorted a degree of respect.

From year to year the old man, with the reins of power thus firmly grasped in his hand, had led Hubert to believe that at some due season he should be admitted his partner and proclaimed his heir. And meanwhile there had been a difficult path for the aspirant to tread through some of the brightest years of eager manhood. Often, indeed, when chafing at the smallness of his means, had he regretted and repented that he had not years before broken loose from his fetters, and flung himself upon his own resources; resources which he felt within himself were sufficient to deserve a brimming measure of worldly success. But then a little voice had whispered of kindness in his boyhood, and of the blackness of ingratitude; and doubtless there had also arisen before his mental eye an *ignis fatuus*-like vision, cheating him to believe that the fruition of his hopes, from time to time, was near.



But tonight—at last—he had the sudden fact, the wondrous news of day-dreams realized, to communicate, and as yet he had not spoken to his Bessie of the event of which his mind was so full. Quite well he knew that no one on earth loved him as did that faithful wife; and yet, made fearful by many cares, she had ever been slow to realize his successes, and trust in his expectations of prosperity. Nay, there seemed some spring in her nature which always rose the most supportingly under trial and difficulty, but trembled and quailed at the prospect of new and wide responsibilities.

At first he had waited till the younger children were out of the room; but though the news he had to tell was of a sort that no man ever yet considered evil, he seemed to halt in his purpose, as if dreading to ruffle his Bessie's present calm content. Besides, she was a sensitive woman, by no means in rude health, and he wished to spare her the start of a surprise.

As he watched her "cutting and contriving," with a pleased smile rippling over her face whenever she found her pattern accommodate itself to a corner, so that her baby's scarlet cloak could be shaped without waste of material, he thought what a paragon wife and mother she had been, and conjured up a thousand scenes exemplifying her patience, her diligence, her devotion. Ah, how they should all be recompensed when he had made her understand—as understand of course she would—that there was no longer need for personal toil or small economies; for petty anxious calculations and trivial painstaking!

"There!" she exclaimed, when the pieces of the little garment were duly shaped and prepared for joining together; "there, I must put baby's cloak away till the morning, and get out some white work. I declare my eyes quite ache from looking at the bright red by gaslight."

"Then, my love," replied her husband, "I must beg

you tomorrow to buy baby a pretty cloak, ready made, and not put a stitch into anything which hurts your eyes."

"Hubert, what are you talking about?" and Mrs. Freeth looked up as she spoke, with evident surprise.

"My dear Bessie, I mean exactly what I say;" and feeling aware that now the ice was broken, he added, "I am sure, if you never thread a needle again, you will still have done enough work already in your life for any two good mothers; and, for the future, we will have the children nicely dressed without taxing your dear eyes."

"But the expense, Hubert! Why, I thought you understood such things better than men generally do, and I never expected to hear you talk such nonsense."

"I think I am talking excellent sense," he said, with a smile, "although it is suddenly suggested; for, my darling, I never heard you complain of your eyes aching before."

"Oh, it is of no use complaining; but they do ache when I work for more than an hour or two."

"Then you see my law must be carried out. You shall have all the gold there is in my pocket to buy baby's cloak;" and, as he spoke, he took from his pocket, in man fashion, a handful of money, and picked out three sovereigns from among the shillings and sixpences. "There, I don't want them; I am going to draw a lot of money tomorrow."

"A lot of money!" exclaimed the wife; "but tell me how much. If your uncle were going to double the last commission, we could not afford to go on in this way. Catherine comes home tomorrow, and I expect she will want a quantity of new things, she is so careless with her clothes, and so inclined to be extravagant."

"I am glad of it," said the husband, with the air of one who in a game of skill is advancing favorably.

"Glad! Why, she has tastes more fit for a duchess than for a poor man's daughter. My dear Berty, you are so odd tonight, that you quite frighten me." And Mrs.



Freeth took out her handkerchief to wipe the eyes which were moistened either from their "aching" or from irrepressible emotion.

And now Hubert Freeth rose from his chair, and drew his wife toward him, and kissed her again and again with something better than lover-like tenderness and devotion.

"My darling!" he exclaimed, "I wanted to tell you that competence, more than competence, is coming to us at last; and this is why I am glad that our blooming Kate has tastes which can help us properly to fulfil our new duties."

"What is it?—what are you to be?" asked the wife, in a husky voice, and hiding her face on his shoulder.

"Ostensibly, partner with my uncle; but, perhaps, in reality, the true leader in his great undertakings. See, these government contracts alluded to in the city article of today, they are undertaken from my plans and my calculations; and it really would appear that my uncle has been seized at last by the spirit of generosity. He seems suddenly anxious that all the world should recognize my services, and that I should reap a harvest of many bygone undertakings. It is true that motives are generally mixed. At seventy years of age he may feel that he cannot carry out these great schemes without the acknowledged coöperation of all my powers,—and he would not have the world think him unjust at the end of his career. All this I wanted to tell you, my Bessie, without giving you a sudden start and surprise; for ever since you fainted away at a piece of good news, I have understood what a fragile little body it is."

"Oh, that day I was ill and exhausted; you need not have feared for me tonight. Well, now," she added, in a half-coaxing tone, "now that you will have so many people under you to do all the work at the office just as you order them, you will be able to come home early always, will you not?—and that will be so delightful."

"Nay, my labors are not to be lightened. Very much the contrary, I assure you. And for this reason I shall want from the best wife in the world all the assistance possible to make the small disturbing circumstances of life disturb me as little as possible. I know very well that for the next few weeks domestic matters cannot be much altered; but as soon as we get into a suitable commodious dwelling, my Bessie shall have a banker's account of her own, and I shall be able to afford the family such an income that I think she will never have anxieties about money matters again."

"Must we leave this house?" asked the wife, with something very like a sigh.

"With an income likely to range between four and five thousand a year, we need not put up with inconveniences to which it has been a duty to submit with only four hundred."

"Four or five thousand a year!" exclaimed Mrs. Freeth; and her cheek so paled, that, for a moment, her husband feared a repetition of the fainting. "But, surely," she continued, "you do not mean to spend such a sum; surely we ought to save quite half of such an income."

"No, I think not; for my uncle assures me that I and my children are his principal legatees, and his large fortune will be amply sufficient to divide, ultimately, even among seven."

"But how can we spend such an income?"

"How? Why, do you see any difficulty? and with seven children! Was there ever such a woman in the world before!" and another kiss preceded the next words. "In the first place," he continued, "Lionel can now have his will, and study for the bar in right earnest."

"He will be delighted, of course; but still it seems hard," she added with a sigh, "it seems hard to sacrifice the money we scraped together for his articles with such difficulty only two years ago."



"That does not signify at all. The boy has studied early and late, as we know he is doing at this moment, and has managed to cram a great deal of law into his head during the last two years; and it will not vanish under more favorable training. Indeed, when one considers that he has performed drudging duties not usually demanded from an articled clerk for the sake of obtaining a small salary, it is wonderful what he has done, and I feel that we are justified in believing that his strong desire to study the law is an instinct it would be almost criminal to thwart. I shall write to Smith & Brown to cancel his articles tomorrow, and send him to one of the universities immediately. As for the younger children, they ought to cost me hundreds a year for a long time to come."

"Of course, dear Hubert, all these things must be as you think best."

"Yes, yes; but I want you, my love, to see the propriety, indeed the necessity, of carrying out the plans. My uncle has given me three thousand pounds to furnish a house, and set us forward."

"Oh, how good of him! I am sure I am very grateful for such prosperity, and I dare say you are quite right in your ideas. Only the whole thing is so sudden; my mind is quite bewildered with so many new projects."

"Is it so sudden?" said her husband. "It does not seem so to me. Year after year I have been hoping for a larger income; and do you not remember how often you have said that a little more money was all that was necessary to make us completely happy?"

"Yes, another fifty pounds now and then, when it was such a hard matter to keep the bills under. But you know I have often said I did not altogether envy rich people."

"Sour grapes, surely!" exclaimed Hubert Freeth, with some impatience in his tone.

"Don't be vexed with me, dear Berty," said Mrs. Freeth, meekly. "What I meant was that I did not envy

rich people their great responsibilities, and the restless excitement of their manner of living. And now that we are going to have so much money, I am afraid we are laying down plans to do just like the rest of the world."

"But what is the use of money without one spends it?"

"I should like it to have and to give, and to spend liberally too; but I have lived so quietly all my life, that I am sure I should be shy and frightened among gay and extravagant people."

"Well, darling, there will be plenty, I think, for you to have and to give, as well as to spend liberally. And as for your being shy and frightened in a different circle, the idea is absurd. You are pretty and sensible and well bred; fit, in my opinion, to adorn any station. You will soon grow accustomed to many things which now seem strange; surely, you are too well disciplined to become selfish and enervated by luxury, and in a little time you will find your sphere of usefulness vastly extended. Money is a mighty power; think of the difference it will make to our children! Besides, merely spending money with judgment and liberality does a great deal of good; but I see I must instruct you a little in political and social economy before you will rejoice at prosperity as I do."

"I *do* rejoice," said the wife, laying her hand affectionately on his arm, "and have my own little castle building already, I assure you. Only I rejoice not without fear and trembling. And when you talk, Hubert, so warmly about money, I cannot forget that you have often said mind has a greater influence than money."

"Well, in the sense of its remoter consequences, so it has. But when mind and money are united, they make a nearly irresistible influence."

"An influence that needs wise direction," observed the lady.

"Yes, yes; of course. But what I want you to understand is that money, whether we earn or inherit it, still

represents labor; that is, labor directed by mind,—since no other is productive. Therefore, money has a right to the respect which is often only blindly paid to it; and I feel that we are justified in assuming some new dignity. Believe me it is so; and again and again I say, let us both rejoice and be grateful that prosperity has come at last!"

CHAPTER II.

ROUND THE TEA-TABLE.

WHEN Mrs. Freeth presided at the tea-table the following evening, she could hardly believe that only a single day had passed since the conversation already recorded. New interests, new duties, new expectations had bridged over the hours, and so marked the life of to-day, that the life of yesterday seemed to recede comparatively deep into the past. Even the aspect of the room was visibly changed. Instead of needlework, letters and writing materials were scattered about, and several parcels, newly arrived, spoke of recent purchases.

Some of the children were present, and evidently in high spirits. Phœbe, a pretty-looking girl of fifteen, aware of her prettiness, shook back her curls from time to time with a toss of the head that was habitual to her, but had never been quite so marked as tonight. Some people said Phœbe Freeth's affectation had been a good deal fostered by her godmother, a sentimental single lady, who lived in a world of unrealities, and did a vast deal of mischief with the best intentions in the world. But she was really attached to the girl, and generous to her, half dressing her by presents. Moreover, there was a nice little fortune in the Three Per Cents., some portion of which certain sanguine members of the Freeth family thought would very likely be ultimately bestowed on the goddaughter and namesake. And all but the wisest of parents are apt to deal leniently with errors of judgment in such "fairy godmothers."



The next sister, Jane, a year younger, yet with a wider sweep of character already observable in her nature, sat more quietly and silently than her sister, but with pleasure beaming in her eyes. Being healthy, growing girls, their appetites were not very liable to derangement, and yet I think their minds were so occupied with pleasant anticipations, that the bread and butter would have been a little spared that evening had not Gilbert, the next in age, and little Edward—generally called "Teddy"—been prepared to make up for all deficiencies.

Of course, the great good news which had been communicated to the children was realized by them somewhat vaguely. But children mentally cultured, who have been brought up in a rigidly economical household, are apt to have exaggerated notions about the delights of wealth, and perhaps prematurely to possess a little stock of worldly wisdom. In fact, "genteel poverty" is not good for the manners or morals of anybody.

The two young girls had only dim ideas of the changes which were impending; but their expectations included fine new clothes, and a considerable increase of pocket-money, dancing and music-lessons from accomplished masters, and the privilege of giving young parties, as well as sometimes going to them. For they argued to themselves that mamma would never again extinguish hopes by repeating a phrase with which they were very familiar,—"My dears, we cannot afford such things."

As for Gilbert, his father had already promised him a watch, a fact which he announced as "jolly," and evidently looked on as the one good thing which was sufficient for today. Gilbert was a boy more given to doing than dreaming; he was calm-tempered and good-natured rather than impulsively generous, and had a mathematical head, which impelled him to try and find out the "why" of everything.

"Will papa be late tonight?" asked the boy, as he stretched out his hand for another slice of bread and butter.

"I cannot tell you," replied Mrs. Freeth; "he said I was on no account to wait for him, his movements were so uncertain. But why do you want to know?"

"About my watch. Do you think he will bring it home today?"

"I should think not," said the mother, with a smile. "I fancy papa has been a great deal too busy today to think about the watch."

Gilbert looked a little crestfallen; but perhaps he consoled himself with the large spoonful of marmalade which he was in the act of taking.

"Gilbert, Gilbert!" exclaimed his mother, "what are you doing? Marmalade *or* butter; I will not allow both."

"Oh, just for this once, mamma,—pray do."

"It is such extravagance," pursued Mrs. Freeth; "think of poor children who often have not dry bread to eat."

"What is the use of thinking of them if we cannot help them. I am sure if a hungry child were here I would give it this very slice."

Nevertheless, Master Gilbert munched his bread and butter *and* marmalade with evident satisfaction, undisturbed by an exhortation that had no novelty to recommend it. Perhaps little Teddy looked wistfully at the jar of marmalade, but five-years-old had not the rebellious daring of twelve.

"Is Lionel going to meet Catherine at Paddington?" asked Phœbe.

"Yes; but the train is not due till past eight. However, he said he should not attempt to come home first."

"I envy Lionel," observed Jane, "having such delightful good news to tell Catherine."

"Of course he will tell her," replied Mrs. Freeth.

"Oh, yes, in his off-hand way. I can just fancy him," said Phœbe, with a toss of her curls.

"I like Lionel's way," exclaimed Gilbert, who had a



great admiration for his "grown-up" brother. "He can talk by the hour; but for all that he is the best fellow in the world for making one understand a thing. Mamma, what did Lionel's watch cost? Do you know?"

"I don't know. It was a present from Uncle Thomas, you remember."

Evidently, the one idea was still paramount; though the boy was comforting himself very satisfactorily under the expectation of *not* having his watch tonight. "Papa never broke a promise," he said to himself, so it would be sure to be brought home some day soon.

Hubert Freeth was not in the habit of dining at home except on Sundays, and it was no unusual thing for his wife to be told not to wait tea. This evening, however, he reached his suburban home while his family were still at the table, but his greeting, though gay and affectionate, was hurried, and his manner absent; and, after extricating the newspaper from his pocket, he said to his wife: "There, Bessie, you will see what is said of our scheme; but I have not time to read it to you. I must have a fire lighted in the drawing-room,—I have letters to write and plans to consider, and you must keep the house quiet, for I shall be busy all the evening. Tea? No, that looks too poor. Cannot I have a cup of strong coffee brought to me in the next room?"

And the fire was speedily lighted, though the room—disused since Sunday, and this was Thursday—took a long time in growing warm; and the anxious wife made the bright strong coffee herself, and carried it to her husband with her own hands. She was a little vexed that he had to shut himself up away from her for hours, but she understood that of course he must have a great deal to do; he spoke to her so lovingly, and looked himself so really happy, that she was reconciled,—even to her pretty little drawing-room being disarranged, and its bright stove dimmed.

Hardly had she returned to the warm parlor when the garden gate creaked, and the next minute there was a knock at the door.

"Who can it be at this hour?" exclaimed Mrs. Freeth; "it is too early for Catherine to arrive."

"It is like Mrs. Brindley's knock," said Jane, who was rather a shrewd observer of peculiarities.

Almost as she spoke there was heard the clear treble tone of their neighbor's voice, inquiring if Mrs. Freeth were at home, and would admit her this evening.

"Oh, pray walk in, we are quite alone," said Mrs. Freeth, herself opening the parlor door, and greeting her acquaintance with much cordiality.

"Thank you, thank you," returned Mrs. Brindley, removing a thick veil and calash which she had put on over a becoming head-dress, and revealing the face of a handsome woman in her prime. "I thought you would excuse an evening visit," she continued, "and I knew this was the most likely time to see Mr. Lionel, whose advice I want on a little business."

"Lionel is gone to meet his sister, and will not be home for an hour or two; but pray," said Mrs. Freeth, "pray spend the evening with me, and then you will see him. And Catherine I am sure will be delighted to find you here. I don't think I have delivered half the 'loves' to you and your daughter which her letters have contained."

"Well, really, if I do not trespass. Aline is writing her German exercises, and will be glad to be left at them in peace."

"And my husband is shut up busy with his plans; I shall quite enjoy your company."

Mrs. Freeth spoke with absolute sincerity. Her visitor was a pleasant friendly neighbor; one of those people who would, she was sure, rejoice in the rising fortunes of the family; and here was a charming opportunity of communicating the important news.

And when speedily, by some convenient and ready *à propos*, the leading fact of Mr. Freeth's change of position was mentioned, Mrs. Brindley apprehended the situation with accuracy. Moreover, in the future which was dawning, a vista of consequences was defined to her far more clearly than to her hostess. But not the less heartily did she offer her congratulations; and *she* also spoke with "absolute sincerity." She liked the Freeths, but thought they would be far more likeable rich than poor.

Mrs. Brindley had known grave sorrows in her life; yet was she a cheerful ready-witted woman. And, having seen much of the world in different countries and among many sorts of people, she had a fund of shrewdness and worldly wisdom. But she was not a reading woman; not a woman who wooed or cherished any high ideal; not venerative, but rather the contrary, loving power and influence, and liking to lead and feel herself a chief, as people with considerable self-esteem and self-will are apt to do. She never railed at the world, but, indeed, thought it a pleasant enough world for the generality of people, supposing they had pretty good health and rather good looks, and were not exactly poor. As may be supposed, she had very little pity for sentimental sorrow, and having the smallest amount of aspiration after those high delights which on earth are rarely if ever realized, she was singularly equable and cheerful, seldom or never being bowed down by disappointed hopes.

Mrs. Brindley's voice was not unmusical, though treble-toned, and of a character that reminded one of an instrument kept always at concert pitch. Some people fancied that there was a ring of insincerity about it, but that suspicion was a harsh one. She took people as she found them, and usually made the best of her opportunities, like many another "woman of the world," past, present, and, no doubt, to come. Though decidedly a talker, she was not an ill-natured gossip or scandal-monger. She

never bruised a reputation by dark hints or innuendoes, but was generally ready to put a fair instead of a foul construction on events which seemed mysterious. Once, when she was complimented on this amiable trait of her character, Mrs. Brindley admitted that she made it a point of conscience thus to act,—it was doing as she would be done by, from which conduct she hoped never to deviate. And as Mrs. Brindley was by no means in the habit of talking about her conscience, the little sermon had the more weight.

In her teens she had married an officer in the Indian army, but he was not the object of her first girlish attachment. Major Brindley was old enough to have been her father, and though understanding that he had a younger rival, had still wooed perseveringly. Quite suddenly he was rewarded. Susan Karvill had been brought up by a guardian who favored the addresses of the major, but could not positively coerce his ward. One day he had interviews with the two suitors for her hand; subsequently an interview with the young girl herself, the immediate result of which was a swoon, from which she passed into a fit of tears and hysterics. But three days afterward she accepted Major Brindley's renewed proposals, began her preparations for a speedy marriage and a voyage to India, and appeared to have transferred her affections with astonishing facility to the now legitimate object of them. And indeed she made him, during the dozen years of her married life, a faithful, companionable wife.

These were the outlines of her history, with which her old and intimate friends were familiar; but she was a comparatively recent acquaintance of the Freeths, who had known her only since her return from India as a widow to claim an only daughter, who had already been sent to England for her education. Achilles had his vulnerable heel, and Mrs. Brindley had one strong affection in her seemingly unimpassioned nature,—she loved her daughter with true maternal devotion.

"Really, it seems like a dream," said Mrs. Freeth, after enumerating some of the changes which were impending.

"Rather the bright and pleasant realization of a dream, I should think," replied Mrs. Brindley; "surely you must often have fancied that old Mr. Freeth would some day or another make amends for his former parsimony."

"I hardly know, I am sure. When we were first married I did wish and hope for more money, and built fine castles in the air as to what I should do with it. But now that we have struggled through so much, now that the elder children are so nearly educated, life altogether seems different. Of course, to feel that one has competence is a wonderful relief, and I have plenty of wishes which money may gratify. Yet I feel—well, I am afraid I am a little ungrateful—but I almost wish the increase of income were less, so that we need not make any great changes."

"My dear," said Mrs. Brindley—who, though somewhat the younger of the two, always slightly petted and patronized her friend—"my dear, you are ungrateful if you so little heed having plenty of money."

"Oh, I should wish to have plenty of money."

"Well, then, what is it that makes you only half pleased?"

"Do I seem only half pleased? Why, that is very like what Hubert said to me this morning. I suppose it is my nervous apprehension of new scenes and new people. And the last few months—ever since our landlord did up the house so nicely—we have been so happy and comfortable, and now to have to look out for a larger house is such a trouble; and Hubert requires so much."

"I remember he has often complained of want of room; and really a man does require a den of some sort, if only that a woman may keep the rest of the house fit for civilization."

"He is very good," mused Mrs. Freeth; "he knows that I hate litters; but from something he said this morn-

ing, I am afraid he has often stayed at the office when he could have worked at home if he had had what you call a den. Even his dressing-room has Gilbert's bed in it, so that he can hardly call it his own."

"He is a model of a man to have put up with so much inconvenience, I am sure. Now, for my part, I should think it quite delightful to begin the house-hunting and house-furnishing under the present pleasant circumstances."

"Should you? Oh, then, dear Mrs. Brindley, will you help me with your judgment and advice? I shall feel so grateful if you will!" and the usually placid little lady pressed her friend's hand quite energetically.

"You do me honor, I am sure. But I must consider the subject. I doubt if I am altogether equal to the occasion."

"Oh, yes, you are. I have often heard my husband cite you as particularly clever and sensible, and what he calls practical. And Lionel and Catherine will be sure to think what you do right."

"They are very kind and complimentary," returned the lady; and she continued, "How glad you will be to have your eldest daughter at home again, particularly just now; why, she has been absent three months, has she not?"

"Very nearly; and Phœbe and Jane have been almost at a standstill with their studies meanwhile. But when once her aunt gets her down to Five Oaks, she seems always unwilling to part with her."

"No wonder. A lively and accomplished girl like Miss Freeth must be a great acquisition in a country house."

"Well, I suppose so; especially in a house far from a town, and with few eligible neighbors. Only it is dreadfully dull for Kate,—no young people except her Cousin Reuben. I am sure I wonder she has been prevailed on to stay so long."

"Young Mr. Appersley farms his own estate, does he not?" said Mrs. Brindley.

"Yes; he lets one or two small farms, but superintends the rest of his land himself. His minority having been such a long one, the property was well nursed, and it really is very valuable now. He seems to have all the tastes of a country gentleman. I suppose he inherits them from his father; indeed, he is not the least like a Freeth, but a very good fellow nevertheless."

"I suppose your daughter likes a country life?" observed Mrs. Brindley.

"No; I should not consider her fond of the country," replied the mother, after a few moments' consideration, "though she likes it now and then for a change. But she has always been Mrs. Appersley's favorite niece, and her aunt expects to see her at least once a year. However, perhaps very few young people have a genuine love for the country; do you not think so?"

"Well, really, I have never thought much on the subject," returned Mrs. Brindley, "yet I think I have heard you say Mr. Appersley has that taste; and he is quite young, I believe?"

"Only three and twenty, and certainly he is passionately fond of the country; indeed, to a degree that is sometimes ridiculous. He fancies—and his mother has grown to be quite as prejudiced—that there is no hospitality, no sociability in a great town, and, what is a more serious accusation, very little religion or morality."

"Ah, he is an exception to your rule, then," cried Mrs. Brindley, "and very likely his prejudices will wear away in time."

"I think not," said Mrs. Freeth; "for having been so happy as to love a country life in his youth, he can hardly fail to love it still better as he grows older. Besides, he has been a 'little great man' from boyhood, and being an only child, of course the idolized darling of his mother.

He must really be very good, or he would have been quite spoiled long ago."

"Happy Reuben Appersley," said Mrs. Brindley, with that sort of sigh which seems somehow related to a smile, and forgetting at the moment the sage's advice to call no man happy till he died. "Happy Cousin Reuben, to have acquired so early a taste for simple pleasures and an indifferentism to town temptations."

"Well, as for simple pleasures, I don't know. He is a keen sportsman, and rather fond of horse-racing," replied Mrs. Freeth.

"Most country gentlemen are, I think," returned the other lady.

"To be sure, Reuben does not bet," continued Mrs. Freeth, feeling that it was but just to make this declaration; "when he came of age he solemnly promised his mother never to risk a guinea on a horse. This pledge was a great relief to her mind, for her husband had lost heavy sums on the turf. Therefore, even though Reuben sometimes owns race-horses, he never bets."

And in this friendly, confidential chat, the time glided on, till a neat, clean, but homely-looking woman-servant came in to lay the supper-cloth, and the hands of the clock showed that Catherine and her brother were nearly "due."

And now there were too many expectant hearts and listening ears for the cabman to have any occasion to knock. At the sound of his wheels the little passage and doorway were crowded by a loving family group, eager for a kiss from the truant, and even "papa" crept out from his plans and letters, to take his beautiful daughter in his arms, and hug her in a fatherly embrace. And then the younger girls clung about her lovingly and caressingly, hardly giving their mother a chance of attention; and Gilbert, who had been upstairs in the nursery, slid down the banisters, and made a sort of leap at Catherine's neck, knocking off her slightly-fastened travelling hat as he did so.



Well, she is all the readier to have her portrait taken, for no sort of head-covering ever seemed to improve her. Perhaps a tiara of diamonds gleaming upon her abundant soft dark hair might have looked fitly placed, but nothing less regal would have been likely quite to suit her style of beauty. The hat removed, one saw that her hair had been twisted coronet-wise about her head, so as to be neat and compact for travelling. But the chance style was very becoming. It showed her delicate ear, her broad and femininely-formed forehead to advantage, and revealed the perfect arch of her head. Her eyes, of the deep blue of the harebell, were only really seen when fully raised, so thick and long were their dark lashes. Her nose was like her father's, only the aquiline more delicate; her complexion was brilliant without being too florid, though just now flushed from excitement; and her mouth, though not very small, had a beautiful expression. If it be true that temper and selfishness, and generosity and self-control, "make the mouth," then Catherine Freeth's showed, hitherto, only the lines of fair and beautiful moulding.

She was very lovely,—there could be no question on the subject. People might say, "Not my style," or "Too tall for a woman"—I believe she was five feet seven—but they could not deny that she was a beautiful type of a grand style of beauty. She did not look quite her height, her figure was so symmetrical. And she had a white and soft, not very small, but perfectly-shaped hand; just the hand to set off bright rings, and that could wear six or seven at a time without looking overloaded.

"Is your luggage all right?" asked Mrs. Freeth, as her daughter placed a pretty little travelling bag on the table, and prepared to loosen her cloak.

"Oh, the man knows what there is," she cried; "and, besides, Li is looking after it."

Now, there was a negative peculiarity about Catherine Freeth which is worth recording. She never fussed and

fumed about the small daily affairs of life. She did not over-order and over-advise people; but, on the other hand, it must be conceded that she had a certain manner of authority, which, though all the while gracious, gave weight to her directions, and seemed to impress them on the minds of those whom they concerned.

It was not quite every one in the family to whom Lionel would willingly have given up time and paid attention. He was a little like Catherine in some respects, and somehow people never expected him to wait upon them. Of course, on all fit occasions he was ready with the courtesies of a gentleman; but he was just the reverse of that sort of person who is asked to fetch and carry, and be generally useful in a household. However, Catherine's packages were not very numerous, and, as Lionel had no squabble with the cabman, his duties were soon over. Mrs. Freeth, whose hearing was of the keenest, knew by the tone of the man's "Thank you, sir," that her son had overpaid him, and rebuked Lionel for his lavishness.

"I know, mother," he replied; "but there was the luggage; and, besides, what does it signify? Perhaps some poor woman who can only afford sixpence will be his next fare."

"And then he will be insolent to her," said Mrs. Freeth, in a tone of yet deeper regret.

"No, he won't; he'll strike the balance of his night's work, and so let her off fairly. Ah, Mrs. Brindley," he continued, as he perceived their neighbor, and relieving himself of his sister's shawls as he spoke, "this is kind of you to be here to welcome Catherine home again."

As he shook hands with the lady, he instinctively glanced round the room, though perhaps she only was aware of the searching look.

"And Teddy and baby and dear old nurse," exclaimed Catherine. "I have seen every one else; where are they?"

"Here," said a voice near the door; and Teddy, with a



shawl wrapped round him, his bare legs suggesting that he was just ready for bed, and a thin pale woman, about five-and-forty years of age, carrying an infant in her arms, appeared among the group.

"Oh, Janet, you have disturbed baby!" said Mrs. Freeth.

"No, ma'am, she was awake, and so I could not help bringing her down for her sister to see."

But before Catherine took Baby Lucy in her arms, she stooped forward to kiss the faded cheek of the nurse, and the woman, speaking with the tremor caused by tears of joy, whispered the words, "My darling pet,—my blessed one!"

Janet Gillespie had been Catherine's foster-mother, and was no common servant and no common friend.

CHAPTER III.

JANET'S DARLING.

AN hour later, and Catherine had said "good-night" to all her family, and was tripping lightly up the narrow staircase to the little attic bed-chamber, which had been hers for years. There she found, just as she had expected, the gas alight, and Janet Gillespie busy unpacking and arranging for her darling's comfort. Now was the true greeting of the loving two who had been parted for three months; for the blooming girl took the pale woman in her arms, clasped her fondly, and kissed her first on one cheek and then on the other, after the pleasant foreign fashion, showering on her the while merry loving words.

"Now, you dear naughty old thing," she exclaimed, "you ought to have been in bed long ago; you know what the doctor said about early to bed when you were so ill last winter. Let the box rest till morning. I shall only suffer you to sit up ten minutes, and I want all that time to look *at* you and talk *to* you. Yet, stay—I had almost forgotten—there is a parcel for you, a present from Aunt Appersley, with some messages from her; if I forget any of them tonight, perhaps I shall remember them in the morning."

"Mrs. Appersley is always so good; I am sure I don't know how—"

"She does not wish thanks from you, I know," exclaimed Catherine.

"But indeed I do thank her from my heart for all her kindness, and I ought to say so."

"Now, Janet, do you think no one cares for me but yourself?"

"Oh, Miss Kate, what an idea!"

"Well, then, suffer people to be conscious of what they owe you."

"What do you mean, Miss Kate?"

"I mean this, Janet: Aunt Appersley declares that three times, under God's providence, you have saved my life."

"Once, perhaps," admitted the nurse.

"No, three times. First, when I was two months old, and you happened to be travelling in the same stage-coach with your own healthy baby; then I was apparently dying, and you took pity on me, not for fee or reward, only out of pure womanly compassion," and the high-spirited Catherine was visibly affected as she spoke.

Mrs. Appersley must have been telling you this old story over again," replied Janet. "No need, I am sure. I hope she told you, also, that she had my poor baby, as well as you and me, at Five Oaks one whole summer, and that I was treated more like a lady than a hired servant. I remember it all as if it were but yesterday."

"I was going there, was I not," continued Catherine, "to have my life saved somehow, if possible? and they persuaded you to stop,—that is how it all happened, I believe. I never knew my own little history so completely till my aunt told it to me one day last week. Then, when I was a naughty child and played with fire, you prevented me from being seriously hurt, though in tearing away my flaming clothes you were cruelly burnt; and you gave me the port wine in the fever. I remember that myself; and though the doctor said it had saved me, mamma cried and sobbed, and afterward declared that if I had died, it would have seemed like murder."

"The Lord directed me, and you were restored."

"Well, well," continued Catherine, "you must know

how we all love you; and as for Aunt Appersley, I am sure the little presents you have from her sometimes give her more pleasure to send than you to receive."

"She is only too generous to me," said Janet, untying the string of a brown-paper parcel as she spoke.

"It is my fault if you do not like her present," said the young girl, "for she consulted me about it, and I told her I thought for some time you had been wishing for a black silk dress."

"That is true, my dear; but oh, what a beautiful silk! It is almost too good for a servant to wear."

"I will not have you call yourself a servant;" and as she spoke, Catherine stamped her foot in playful mock anger.

"But I am not ashamed of service," continued Janet. "Why should I be?"

"I cannot tell; I only know I don't like to hear you talk of yourself in that way. And as for the dress, nothing, in my opinion, is too good for Mistress Janet Gillespie of that ilk, widow of Archibald Gillespie, the great actor—"

"The poor strolling player," interrupted Janet, with a sad smile.

"Nonsense. I know he was a great actor, just as well as if I had seen him. Well, then, Mistress Janet Gillespie, *née* Campbell, daughter of the great Presbyterian preacher—"

"Who broke her father's heart by her disobedience!" exclaimed the nurse, again interrupting.

"I don't know; the broken heart mended itself sufficiently to keep up its animosity for a dozen years, and make you miserable all the while, if I remember rightly."

"Oh, Miss Kate, my poor father thought he was only doing his duty by setting an example of firmness and severity. And he would not meet my husband,—would not judge for himself."

"Well, well, nothing is too good for Catherine Freeth's dear old nurse. That settles the question. But I hope, Janet, black is what you really wished?"

"My dear, I scarcely ever buy anything else."

"I know that; still, I hope that you do not consider a gift of black unlucky."

"My dear, I am not so silly."

"Oh, but you know you are a little superstitious, and too Scotch not to believe in the second sight."

"Be content, my darling, I have no second sight now."

"Are you quite sure?" said Catherine archly; "quite sure that you have no vague presentiment, no dim foreshadowing about anything?"

"My dear, what do you mean?

"Nay, nay, prophets should not want prompting;" and as she spoke, Catherine busied herself with unplaiting her long hair, drawing it almost like a veil across her face.

"My pet," said the nurse, after a slight pause, and looking searchingly at Catherine the while; "my pet, what has happened? I know you have something to tell me."

"Well, perhaps I have; though I hardly think, Janet, that to you it will be a surprise, whatever it may be to mamma. The truth is, that I have a letter from Aunt Appersley to papa; but knowing its contents, I felt that I could not give it to him in the presence of Mrs. Brindley. And then, after she left, I saw how preoccupied mamma and papa were; how full of new and exciting interests; and they both complained of want of sleep last night, and so I thought,—I thought at any rate my aunt's letter should not be a new cause of wakefulness tonight."

"Mr. Reuben?" asked Janet Gillespie, almost in a whisper; "is it anything about Mr. Reuben?"

"Yes, Janet, Cousin Reuben wants me to marry him; and even Aunt Appersley, proud Aunt Appersley, begs and prays that her niece and namesake will become her daughter. And, Janet," continued the young girl, throwing her arms round the nurse's neck; "and, Janet, if I had not talked gayly and giddily when I first came into my room,

I know I should have burst into tears, and frightened you, as perhaps I am doing now." And the bright beaming Catherine dashed the tears from her eyes as she finished her little speech.

"Then you are engaged?" said Janet inquiringly.

"Not quite formally engaged," replied Catherine; "but still I feel that I have implied consent, subject, of course, to my parents' approval. Reuben drove me to the station, and he took advantage of the hour's *tête-à-tête*. He looked so miserable when I hesitated; and then, when he made me own that I had an affection for him, he declared that brotherly and sisterly love was impossible, except between brothers and sisters. And so—and so at last I said something which satisfied him. And then he gave me the letter, which it appeared his mother had prepared,—foreseeing, I suppose, that I should not be able, at parting from him, to resist his pleadings. But now that I come to think it all over, it seems so sudden and startling, that I almost feel frightened."

"My child, do you love him?—that is the question."

"Love Cousin Reuben? Of course I do, dearly and dearly, like a brother, as I told him,—though not in the same way that I love Lionel, after all."

"Not in the same way that you love Lionel!" exclaimed Janet, in a tone of relief.

"No; because their characters are so different. If I ever vex Lionel, his vexation rebounds on me, and hurts me till I am the more pained of the two. But Li and I never really quarrelled in our lives. When we differ, I generally think, in the end, that he must be in the right."

"And Mr. Appersley?" asked Janet, smiling.

"Oh, when Reuben and I have a difference of opinion, it does not follow that I am wrong and that he is right. But, for all that, he is so good—and generous—and affectionate—"

"That you are going to be his wife," said Janet, filling



up the pause. "Truly," she continued, "truly, to be the wife of a good man, and mistress of such a pretty place as Five Oaks, seems a bright destiny, even for my darling."

"Then you wish me joy, Janet?"

"That I do, always. Only, my child, be sure, be *very* sure, that you really love him. If you doubt yourself on this point, draw back while there is still time."

"Certainly I love Cousin Reuben, who has been good to me all the days of my life. And yet it seems strange to fancy myself his wife. Perhaps I only feel that 'I'm o'er young to marry yet,' as somebody says in the song. Or is it that hardly a year ago I fancied that Reuben was in love with Hester Otway. But Aunt Appersley says it is a mere dream of mine, without the least foundation."

"Mrs. Appersley would never have consented to such a marriage," said Janet gravely.

"So she says; and I believe Reuben is too good a son to have disobeyed her. But is it not hard that poor Hester should be despised on account of her father's fault?"

"The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children," said Janet solemnly, and with a sigh.

"Yes, yes; and I am afraid so surely, that we ought, if possible, to shrink from being the instruments to punish them. If Reuben and Hester had been really in love, as I once fancied, I am sure I should have tried hard to coax my aunt to receive her. However, Reuben vows I am his first love, though he owns to one or two flirtations. Now, Janet," she continued, "I want you to lay auntie's letter upon papa's dressing-glass stand after Gilbert is up in the morning. With so many things on his mind, I don't think reading it tonight would increase papa's chances of sleep."

"I am afraid delaying it may make you wakeful."

"What does that signify?" returned Catherine. "After all, I believe I ought to consider my fate settled. As dear Reuben asked me to marry him before he knew of our recent

good fortune, it would be mean to say no now. I am sure papa will think so, and that this feeling alone may decide him. I am certain that a week ago mamma would have been delighted at the idea; and, therefore, she ought to be doubly pleased now."

"Why doubly pleased, my dear?"

"Doubly pleased, nurse, because both families will have been able to prove their disinterestedness. Now, Janet, I will not have you wait upon me any longer,—no, you shall not touch my hair. I have managed it myself for three months, and you shall never stand over me again tiring yourself to death."

"Oh, but indeed I am not tired tonight."

"Never mind. If you won't go, do as I bid you, and sit down opposite to me, and tell me all the news,—tell me all that has happened since I have been away."

"Everything has gone on much as usual until the last day or two. Of course, you know the great changes that are at hand?"

"Oh, yes; Lionel gave me a general idea of what had happened, and what the plans for the future were. And he was so delighted at his own prospects, that he did not much question me. Dear Li! It would have been very nearly as hard to keep anything from him, had he in the least degree inquired of me, as from you. I believe he has made up his mind to be Lord Chancellor some day or other. I suppose he has been reading as hard as ever?"

"Pretty nearly; but he has taken to chess-playing for recreation."

"I wonder at that. We used to play together when we were children; until one evening we both settled that it was not play at all, but much harder work than our lessons."

"Then I suppose Miss Brindley plays very well," observed Janet; "for when she is here, they generally want the chess-board; and sometimes Mr. Lionel goes round to Mrs. Brindley's, and I fancy for the same object."

"Aline Brindley a chess-player!" exclaimed Catherine, in a tone of surprise, and resting the comb in her lap. "She must have learnt the game since I went away, for I am pretty sure she did not know the moves last summer. I suppose Lionel has taught her what she knows. But to play chess as he would wish an antagonist to play, is about the last thing I should have expected of dear little Aline."

"I don't understand much about it;" said Janet, "but I was in the parlor one night when they were just beginning, and I heard her say something about your brother giving her two or three pieces."

"It is the stupidest thing on earth to play in that way; I have heard Lionel say so a dozen times. But, of course, he would not play with Aline Brindley in any other manner,—unless, indeed, the fairies helped her; she always looks as if she belonged to them."

"She is a sweet young lady," observed the nurse.

"Oh, a child yet, hardly sixteen," replied Catherine.

"That is to say, two whole years younger than yourself," said Janet, with a smile.

"Ah, but I always looked older than my age; and with Aline it is precisely the reverse. She is still—or was three months ago—childish in manner, though clever, I think, and with a little fund of positive wisdom for those who know how to get at it. Perhaps, after all, Lionel may make a chess-player of her. But now, Janet, really and truly you must go to bed. Here is the fateful letter; but take care Gilbert is out of the room before you place it, lest he should ask questions or guess at a mystery."

CHAPTER IV.

FIVE OAKS.

WHILE the elder members of the Freeth family are preparing for rest, with hopes of the sound slumber which Catherine had desired should remain unbroken; and while Mrs. Brindley is explaining to her daughter how lucidly Mr. Lionel Freeth had, in a few words, set the law of her rights and wrongs before her, touching the question of a lease she had signed, we may, by dint of a little thought-travelling, pass some hundred and fifty miles toward the west of England, and make acquaintance with Mr. Reuben Appersley, at the moment when he parted from his Cousin Catherine at the Drakesdale station.

Catherine had journeyed home in charge of some "friend's friends," resident in a neighboring town, and for whose coming to London her aunt had wished her to wait. Therefore, what most truly deserved to be called "last words" had been spoken as Reuben helped her out of his phæton. But he stood till the latest moment near the railway carriage in which his cousin was seated, with his arm resting on the edge of the window; and though his words were few and disjointed, and perfectly free to any ears that chose to listen, Catherine was conscious of his lingering looks, and of the lingering pressure of his hand as they finally parted. When railway guards intervened with their "Now then," and the train began slowly to move in cautious preparation for attaining its express speed, Reuben still remained on the platform, and, indeed, continued

gazing till the red lamps, already lighted, only faintly glimmered in the distance.

The handsome young Squire—as Reuben, for ten miles round, was called—looked "the picture of health;" and the hopes and fears and fervid emotions which had lately coursed through his mind, brightened just now and refined his countenance. Nearly six feet high, and "built" in perfect proportion, he was decidedly an athlete; not the vulgar athlete sculptors too often give us, all thews and sinews, under the control mainly of brute passions, but an athlete of the St. Christopher sort. Yes, Reuben had a tender heart, and, like the Canaanitish giant, he loved far better to lend his strength to the weak and suffering, than to expend it in vain feats.

Perhaps there was a little indolence—or slowness that looked like indolence—in his character; mental indolence, possibly, rather than physical, though it may be remarked that, notwithstanding his love of out of door life, Reuben was but little of a pedestrian. Accustomed to horses from his early boyhood, and always having the control of them, it never seemed to him "worth while" to walk anywhere. His fair complexion bore the ruddy hue of one who spent many hours a day in the open air; while his white even teeth, shown directly he spoke, suggested the idea that fresh air had a bleaching effect more to be relied on than any other dentifrice. A nose well shaped, but a thought too small for the face; honest blue eyes; and a quantity of fair hair which grew fast, and seemed always blowing hither and thither about his forehead, completed the picture of the outward man.

Had you listened to him as he made some commonplace remark to the station-master about the weather, while he rearranged the collar of his driving coat to protect himself from the keen wind that would be in his face as he drove home, you would have detected a savor of provincialism, a twang of the west country drawl. Yes, gentleman that he was—and

Reuben Appersley was every inch a country gentleman—he had not escaped the life-long influences of the district, and truly it might be said of him that "his speech betrayed him."

A country gentleman he was; yet not exactly of that privileged order of "gentry" whose members are at due seasons the companions of princes, and whose training is, as the training of courts ought to be, always more or less cosmopolitan. I am writing of nearly twenty years ago, and Reuben belonged to an order whose ranks were even then sensibly thinned. Since that period, instead of being only sensibly thinned by the reaper Death, the order has wellnigh faded out of knowledge. Not only has no new generation arisen to be stiff-necked and strong with their fathers' bristling prejudices, but middle-aged men have been converted to new principles; and have voluntarily laid down the weapons of argument which they had used so fiercely in their hot youth.

Among his country neighbors, Reuben was considered a very well-informed and polished gentleman. But in reality his information was one-sided; and "polished" would probably have been the last epithet a courtier would have applied to him. He was too kind-hearted, too simply unaffected, too unconscious, in fact, that there was anything in speech or manner for him to affect, ever to be vulgar; but the town-bred world of his acquaintances, on the rare occasions when he had mixed in it, had sometimes called him a "rough diamond," good-humoredly, of course, though behind his back, for Reuben Appersley had noble qualities which made people, even though they quizzed him, like him all the time. There was something fresh and hearty about him; something which, if you saw him sitting on a silken couch in a London drawing-room, would still seem to you like a breath of the hedgerows, still call the mind off from the associations of a crowd to country downs and the wide-spread canopy of heaven.

Reuben Appersley's principles were those of Church and State as by law established. He had a quiet impression that "things in general" had been pleasantly settled in 1688 by William of Nassau; but Macaulay's fervid pages had not yet been universally read to make the word "Revolution" respectable even to country gentlemen. As he had read Scott's novels—scarcely any other works of fiction—and only school-book history, of course he had a lingering liking for the Stuarts, and settled in his own mind that, after all, Hampden was a troublesome fellow, not unlike those desperate radicals who had been the leaders of the recent anti-corn-law league.

He was well acquainted with all the stock arguments in favor of "protection," but he perpetually ignored all that could be said on the other side of the question. He had looked upon the recent triumphs of the free-trade party as the loosening of a bolt that was to bring down an avalanche of ruin upon England. Individually, he was prepared to suffer; but really and truly, his own interests affected his judgment as little as might be. At the most, they only lent a slightly magnifying power to the colored glasses of prejudice through which he looked.

Of course, he despised the manufacturing classes—cotton-spinners especially—and when he gazed upon his own fields, golden for harvest, or talked with his tenants about the state of the crops, he felt a proud superiority, a kind of innocent vainglory, an ample consciousness that he, and such as he, the growers of food, the owners of land "that is always there, sir,—the only real property in the world," were truly the "lords of the creation."

Now, Reuben Appersley's political opinions are important to remember, not only because they wove themselves intimately into his life history, but because they offered, in some sort, a key to his character; as, indeed, a man's political opinions generally do. With equal opportunities of forming a judgment, and making the nearest approaches to

absolute truth, see how different minds will diverge, and arrive at opposite conclusions! Making largest allowance for the force of circumstances, few people will deny that, nevertheless, there are born conservatives and born rebels; although it is sometimes equally true that the rebel is but its opposite seen the reverse way.

Wide-minded, far-seeing people—who never link themselves quite closely, or for long, to any party, and who are called changeable because they are always developing—generally gather up the finest grains of truth which are threshed out in the contentions of extreme partisans.

Reuben had never been so happy as he was at this moment; and, certainly, his happiness was fully to be accounted for and reasoned about, had he happened to be in a reasoning mood. Ever since he could remember, he had loved his Cousin Catherine; but now he was "in love" with her, and she had just said a sufficiently intelligible "Yes" to his suit. A sufficiently intelligible affirmative; for Reuben was a man who would never have been grateful to a woman for sparing him the trouble of much wooing. He abhorred a forward minx far more than he did a skittish horse; he thought a prize well worthy a warm pursuit, and though, of course, when he had perseveringly wooed, and by an offer of marriage ratified his earnestness, it was then quite proper for the intended wife to have a little parcel of love ready to present to him in return; he had not that sentimental faith in the elective affinities which would have pardoned a too early betrayal of regard in the woman he was seeking.

Possibly, one woman in the world—a woman still young, though a year older than himself—had lost her opportunity of accepting or rejecting his hand because she had not exercised a complete control over cheeks and voice and manner. Complete control, I say, for Hester Otway, reared under the dark cloud of a great family trouble, and hated by Mrs. Appersley, had never, in reality, overstepped the

barriers of maidenly reserve. During the short period when Reuben was certainly attracted toward her, he never perceived any tokens which he thought too encouraging. But his mother, who dreaded the alliance beyond measure, —his mother, with what she deluded herself into believing was loyalty to her son, but which, in truth, was cruel disloyalty to her fellow-woman, pointed out a hundred little traits which she exaggerated into proofs of forwardness and eager readiness to be sought. Truly, to have exercised the "complete" self-control would, in Hester's case, have been the archest sort of coquetry.

As Reuben let his pair of thorough-bred horses take almost their own pace on the well-known road home, a thought of Hester Otway did once cross his mind. A steep hill recalled to his memory an incident in which she had been concerned; but the thought was a very fleeting one, accompanied by a feeling of surprise that he ever could have enjoyed her society so much. Today Catherine reigned supreme in his heart, wholly and solely the presiding influence. Every faculty of his being seemed subject to her power. Her voice, dwelling in his ear, was like rich music rising round about him; her image floated before his eyes; the light pressure of her hand on his arm seemed still a reality; and a glove she had not yet missed —but which bore, shell-like, the impress of her fingers— lay nestled near his heart.

Reuben Appersley was not a poet; no training, no circumstances, could ever have converted him into one; but there is a period in the lives of the most prosaic people— provided that they do not belong to the utterly Bœotian order—when a sealed-up sense seems for a little while opened. I should be sorry to believe that there are many men who have not had, at least, a brief love-fever and dream of romance, however hard and stern and practical in later years they may have grown. And Reuben was just now, to a certain extent, under the spell of love's sacred

delirium. To a certain extent; for it is only the nature which has "music in itself," which, when loving ardently, with the passionate fervor of youth, is winged away in the fever dream to the divinest heights of the empyrean!

Thorough-bred horses on a return journey make swift work of their nine or ten miles' task; but Reuben had a commission to execute for his mother, and a question to ask one of his tenants, which, together, delayed him a full half hour, so that the winter twilight was fast deepening into night as he came in sight of the five old trees which gave a name to his house. The moon, near its full, was growing silvery in the frosty air, and making the already leafless trees look weird and spectral, while bright stars were leaping out to mark the constellations, and a few white fleecy clouds—now obscuring, now unveiling the lights of heaven—were sailing rapidly high aloft, as if bent on some urgent mission which earth was too ignoble to learn.

The five oaks were situated about half a mile from the house, toward which the most ancient of the group—a little advanced from the rest—always seemed to lean and point. The land was level now, rich and loamy, and well sheltered by rising ground from the north and east. The spacious red brick dwelling would, I think, have puzzled an architect to classify. Once it had been the manor-house of the district; afterward it was tenanted for a generation by a well-to-do farmer, who built his barns and stables close to his house, and brought his poultry and pigs into something like proximity with the parlor windows. It is true that when the worthy farmer died, and Reuben's father—having just succeeded to the property—determined to dwell in the old manor-house himself, he changed some objectionable arrangements, and reconverted the dwelling into a gentleman's residence. He did more than this. He built a new wing, and added a clock-tower; the result was an incongruous mass of buildings, not exactly offensive to



the eye; extremely comfortable and convenient to occupy, but which defied the rules of architecture and the canons of fastidious taste.

Perhaps the house itself was typical of that transition period in which Reuben Appersley was born, and more especially to which his youth had belonged. The homely, low-roofed chambers, with wide fireplaces, and "dogs" for burning wood instead of ordinary grates,—how different they were from the new library, which was very properly approached by three oaken steps, but which, when you were in it, you found swept upward to the height of the second story.

And the old-fashioned kitchen, with its red-tile flooring, and its rafters overhead; its ponderous, ever-creaking smoke-jack and innumerable bright copper pans,—how it contrasted with the new forcing-houses in which early strawberries and wonderful grapes were ripened; the gardener never complaining that the back of that same kitchen chimney passed right against its wall.

Mrs. Appersley had told her old servant, Rebecca, not yet to close the shutters of the long straggling parlor, which was the general sitting-room. A huge log had lately replenished the fire, and it sent up sparkles, which, in aid of the lamp on the tea-table, quite illuminated the room. At the end opposite the fire was an old square piano, which had belonged to Mrs. Appersley in her girlhood, when, after infinite difficulty, she had succeeded in mastering the elements of music, and had achieved in practice the playing of a few simple compositions. For years past the piano had remained unopened, and condemned to serve the stubborn uses of a sideboard. Just now a white cloth was spread upon it, with a ham in cut, and a meat pie in readiness to satisfy Reuben's appetite after his long drive. It was only between five and six o'clock; but early dinners were the rule at Five Oaks, and it was thought proper to call meals taken later than two or three

o'clock in the day by other names. A bright silver tankard, however, suggested an idea of home-brewed ale, and some decanters, half full of different sorts of wine, indicated that Mrs. Appersley was prepared with an alternative, should her son decline tea.

The side of the room opposite to the windows was decorated by a large picture,—a full-length portrait of Reuben's father standing by the side of a favorite race-horse. Beneath the picture was a slab, which supported a gold cup, bearing an inscription to the effect that it had been won by the beautiful bay above represented. There were people who rather wondered that Mrs. Appersley thus kept perpetually before her this memento of the turf.

It is true that the cup commemorated a triumph,—but it was the one triumph of a long career; the evil bait; the fatal lure which had led on to terrible losses, and to events which had all but compromised the elder Appersley's credit. All but,—and not quite; for if Mrs. Appersley's husband had been really disgraced, or had she believed that he deserved obloquy, she was the sort of woman to have asked for his name never to be mentioned in her hearing, and would have shut away out of sight every memorial of his existence. As it was, she would have thought putting away an article merely because it had disagreeable associations a culpable weakness, a degree of giving way to her feelings of which she ought to be ashamed. So she not only suffered the cup to remain in its appointed place under the glass shade, which was locked down to the bracket, but at stated intervals she herself brushed and polished the trophy.

Two or three less conspicuous portraits and the likenesses of two favorite dogs completed the pictorial adornments of the room, which, being neither *the* dining-room nor *the* drawing-room, was made, on ordinary occasions, to serve the purposes of both. Above the tall chimney-piece, quite out of reach of moderate-sized people, were suspended



two pairs of antlers woven together inextricably in a deadly fight, and just in the state in which they had been found, nearly a hundred years ago, in what was then the park. Another relic of a somewhat similar nature likewise hung on the wall,—grim memorial that "all creation groaneth." It was the skull of a huge hound that had been pierced by a bullet; but through the fracture and through the eye-sockets some vigorous sapling had pushed its roots, spreading them out fan-like afterward, so that the skull looked like a ghastly bead threaded on several strings. Now, these bony relics were, undoubtedly, curiosities in their way; but to Mrs. Appersley they had a tenfold preciousness, because they had been discovered on her husband's domains.

Mrs. Appersley was one who—unless they were obviously unworthy—attached an inordinate value to her own special belongings; and hers was a trait which, with all its advantages and disadvantages, we see often enough in the world. Her husband, notwithstanding some grave defects of character, had been, in her eyes, a distinguished and superior man; and as for Reuben, she considered him nearly perfection. The air of Five Oaks, she always contended, was the most salubrious in England; the soil the richest and most productive. The fruit and flowers of the Five Oaks' garden were incomparably the finest in the county, and the old house was, in her opinion, the most substantially built of any within twenty miles. No room she ever knew was so warm in winter, so cool in summer, as that in which we now see her watching for her son, as well as she could watch from a lighted room, looking out into the night. By dint of drawing a dark curtain behind her tall person, she managed pretty well.

The mother was anxious for her son's return; anxious, that is, in the sense of "eager," for she had no doubt as to the issue of Reuben's pleadings. She had set her heart upon his marrying her niece and godchild; her namesake

too, for she herself was a Catherine; the child, her judgment and her purse had, in its babyhood, been instrumental in saving; and now, in the brightest bloom of her young womanhood, she was the most proper wife for her son.

Mrs. Appersley did not quite know her own heart, or understand from what mixed motives she had lately been acting. That she had always liked Catherine, thought highly of her, and, in a manner, petted her, is quite true; she could not help all this,—the girl so much belonged to her. But it was only on the recent visit, when she had fully realized the beauty and captivating qualities of her niece, that it had flashed on her mind,—not, indeed, that Catherine was quite worthy of her son, for no woman she had ever seen seemed that, but that she had found a spell which might allay forever a dreadful fear; a fear which had poisoned her life for nearly a year; a terror which had robbed her of sleep, and whitened her dark hair; which had made her flesh shrink, and her hand tremble,—the terror that her son, her darling, only child, would want to marry a woman whom she scorned and detested.

Want to marry, mark you; for though Reuben was, of course, legally his own master, his mother never acknowledged to herself such a possibility as his actually marrying without her consent and approval. But to contend with this dear child, to have to argue and expostulate, command and threaten,—the very thought of such things made her brain reel.

Certainly, Catherine had not a fortune,—that was a drawback, Mrs. Appersley admitted. Yet what more likely than that ultimately her father would be rich? Uncle Thomas could not live forever, and,—"shrouds have no pockets." Surely, it was among the high probabilities that, after all, the marriage of Reuben with his cousin would be a "good match," even in the worldly point of view. And the girl herself was really charming. So the clever, strong-willed woman bent all the opportuni-



ties of Catherine's protracted visit to the one purpose; and Mrs. Appersley schemed so well, that the cousinly admiration which Reuben had really felt was fanned and fostered into an ardent passion. Even Catherine's slowness to understand; her unreadiness to believe in the changed character of the love which was required from her, was all turned to profitable account,—all insisted on as indications of the sweetest modesty and innocence and truth.

And so now the mother watched expectantly at the window, feeling this day to be one of the most fateful in her life. And a beautiful dog, of the retriever-spaniel sort, that was stretched before the fire, with cold nose pillowed on her silky paws, lifted her head now and then to listen, as if she too were conscious it was time for her master to return Floss had attached herself to Catherine in a most demonstrative manner; but she had understood the meaning of packed boxes and general leave-taking, and ever since Catherine had last stooped to caress her—and, I am afraid, pressed her lips on the dog's shining head—Floss had remained what Mrs. Appersley called "sulky." Alas! many besides Floss had been called sulky when they were only sorry; and I think it was a harsh judgment so to interpret the dog's listless movements, and her little moans —so like human sighs—after she had settled herself on the rug.

At last, the sound of wheels was heard, and the sharp ring of the horses' hoofs on the frosty road. Doors flew open in readiness for the young master's entrance, and before he reached the parlor, Floss was about his feet with wagging tail and looks of mute inquiry. The first glance at her son convinced Mrs. Appersley that her expectation was fulfilled, even before his words,—the first he uttered after the room door had been closed behind him.

"All right, mother; she consented to take your letter, and I am the happiest man alive!"

"Thank God!" ejaculated Mrs. Appersley with solemnity, and—a rare occurrence with her—bursting into tears.

"Why, mother, dear mother!" said Reuben tenderly, and placing her in a chair as he spoke, "how is this? I thought you never had any doubt of my ultimate success, and now you behave as if my words were a great relief and almost a surprise!"

"No, no, not a surprise," returned Mrs. Appersley; "not a surprise. But when one has set one's mind on the attainment of an object, delay is irritating, and the final success very delightful. I suppose these are what are called tears of joy. I hope I shall not make such a fool of myself again, for I detest weeping women."

"Well, mother, you do not belong to the class, I am sure," exclaimed Reuben; "and I can forgive you for participating so warmly in my joy. What a miserable thing it would have been if I had fallen in love with a girl you did not like! And Kate is so fond of you. We shall be such a happy family!"

"I hope so, I am sure; she is a thoroughly good girl, and easily guided."

"Oh, as for that, I would not have her much guided," observed Reuben.

"Well, well, not exactly guided; but young people want advice sometimes."

And as Mrs. Appersley spoke, she was vaguely conscious that it would henceforth be often necessary to weigh her words very carefully before she uttered them; but perhaps she was unsuspicious that now that her own main object was virtually attained, her ruling passion, the love of dominion, was already taking new forms, and shaping out fresh purposes.

"No, we would not have her guided and controlled, nor altered in the least degree, would we, Floss?" he continued, speaking to the dog, which was again fawning about him, and patting it as he proceeded; "you jade,



what is it you want to ask with your great brown eyes, and your restless ears? She is gone; yes, I tell you she is gone; don't you understand? You wish you could talk about her, Floss, don't you, and tell me how much you love her?"

Reuben's nonsense was not quite purposeless. He wished to give his mother time to recover herself before they sat down to their miscellaneous meal, or before discussing delightful details about twenty little affairs, which impending changes would really make imperative and important.

CHAPTER V.

A BETROTHAL.

HUBERT FREETH was an intellectual man, with faculties apparently well-balanced, and powers as yet but rarely overstrained. His good fortune, therefore, had done its worst in one direction, and was not likely to deprive him of a second night's rest. He had gone to bed, after Catherine's return home, with a vague notion that if he had but a sanctum—as he would have before he was many weeks older—where a fire could always be ready laid for lighting, and a patent apparatus for making coffee be likewise prepared for his use, he should rise for "work" the next morning long before servants were stirring; and yet he really overslept himself. Indeed, he remained unawakened by little Teddy's trotting about overhead, or by the buzz and stir which in a small house always declare that the family is rising betimes. Healthy, happy children are like little larks ready to sing, or chirrup and flutter, with the morning dawn; and though their happy merriment has broken many a precious slumber, why, that is better than that a young child should be prematurely saddened by overquieting.

Probably, Hubert Freeth was well accustomed to nursery noises; at any rate, Janet Gillespie had the fit opportunity for taking his sister's letter to his dressing-room before he was stirring. How Catherine's heart beat, as, while making her simple toilet, she listened for a familiar sound,—her father's bang of his door.

She heard it at last. She could count how many seconds

would elapse before he must see her aunt's letter,—not how many minutes it might occupy in being read; for she knew only its purpose, not the detail of expressions in which her aunt had indulged. She wondered how her mother would bear the surprise; or whether, indeed, it would be such a surprise as she had imagined! Had she done wrong in delaying the delivery of the letter a night? Had she done wrong at all under the present circumstances of her life? And Catherine paused in the plaiting of her hair, and sat still to think, until she was nearly benumbed in the chill attic, and was glad to wrap a warm travelling-shawl about her. I think she remembered the yesterday morning, when she rose in a certain sunny room, which had mysterious communications with the conservatory pipes.

Presently she heard her mother's foot upon the stairs, and in the next minute Mrs. Freeth was in the room, and clasping her daughter in her arms. She too was only half dressed, but she could not delay, between her tears of joyful emotion, putting questions to her child—setting them between blessings and ejaculations—but, it must be owned, not always waiting for replies. Mrs. Freeth could be energetic enough when her feelings were deeply concerned.

"Object, my dear! That could not possibly be the case. Indeed, if the offer had come a week ago, I am afraid it would almost have turned my poor head. And, indeed, as it is, it is a good match, a great match for you, my child; a really good position—equal even to your father's changed condition—and without the uncertainty and anxiety of a profession."

"Reuben is very good," said Catherine; "and from childhood we have been the best of friends. And, mamma, I am sure he loves me very dearly."

"Of course he does, or he would not want you to be his wife. After all, that is not very surprising; you are not frightful, my dear, or stupid or ill-tempered. Only, Mrs. Appersley has shown more real sense, perhaps I should say

more generosity, than I gave her credit for, in wishing her son to marry early, and in being so well satisfied with his choice."

"I cannot tell you," replied Catherine, "how kind my aunt has been to me during this last visit; and yet, when I think of what has passed, it all seems like a dream. One thing, however, I have made Reuben promise, and that is, that he will not claim me very soon or very suddenly."

"Ah, I am glad of that," returned the mother; "for we want you—indeed we do—we want you at home more than ever just now. And, besides, though I rejoice at your prospects, the parting from you will be a trial when the time comes." And, as she spoke, Mrs. Freeth again grew tearful.

"Dear mamma, we need not talk about the parting yet," said Catherine, her arm still clinging round her mother's neck; "and papa," she continued, "busy papa; will it distract his mind to think about my little affairs?"

"Your papa put his sister's letter into my hands with but few comments; yet I could see that he had not an objection to make, and he said that Uncle Thomas would certainly approve of such a marriage. But hark! there is the breakfast-bell ringing, and I am in my dressing-gown still. We are all so late this morning; and if Phœbe and Jane attempt to make breakfast, they will half empty the tea-caddy."

"Do not mind me," exclaimed Catherine. "I am sure I cannot be ready for some time yet."

And it was quite true that Catherine was much too agitated to expedite her toilet; and when at last she was dressed, a strange shyness came over her, and made her dread meeting her family. She wished Janet would come to her, and comfort and encourage her, till she remembered that the old nurse was always busy with the younger children at that time in the morning.

Then she reasoned with herself, and determined not to give way to such foolish feelings; and she had opened her bedroom door, and was standing on its threshold, when she

saw her father coming up the narrow staircase. Yes, it was "busy papa," who understood the natural emotions of his dear daughter, and had waited for her, not wondering at her absence from the breakfast-table that eventful morning. Be it remembered, *he* was not called to the rescue of the tea-caddy.

There was a smile on the father's countenance as he took Catherine in his arms, but he only said: "My pet, no one knows yet, but mamma and me."

"And Janet," whispered Catherine, who loved accuracy in all things.

"Ah, well,—then of your own telling, my love. But come to breakfast now; I am to expect a letter from Reuben himself tomorrow, am I not?"

"Yes."

At the breakfast-table, Lionel—dear, unsuspecting Lionel—talked delightedly of his own changed prospects; and Phœbe and Jane apprised their sister that they were going to have a proper governess instead of learning lessons with her. And though Mrs. Freeth looked guilty of a secret, her children, intent on their own special interests, regarded her less than usual that morning.

Very sacred was the interview between Catherine and her parents which speedily followed; they extracting from her the particulars of her recent visit. Very straightforward and affectionate was Mrs. Appersley's letter to her brother, in which—though she wrote like the elder sister, and somewhat authoritative member of the family that she was—she nevertheless did justice to Catherine's deserts, while asking her as a wife for her son. And very honest and manly and heartily lover-like was Reuben Appersley's own letter, which arrived by the next day's post; and when Hubert Freeth prepared, in due form, to ratify his daughter's engagement by his written consent and approbation, it was not without visible and joyous emotion that he traced the necessary lines.

Truly, the cup of worldly prosperity, which for long years had been so sparingly supplied, seemed suddenly sparkling up in bright bubbles toward the brim. Hubert Freeth felt more vividly conscious than ever of the capacities of himself and his children for the enjoyment of wealth, and their fitness to occupy prominent positions in society. Thanks to that mathematical order of mind which, when allied to some imaginative powers, loves to foresee and prearrange the sequence of events, he found himself, half involuntarily, even planning a future for his intended son-in-law; a future which should lift him to a greater distinction than that of a mere country gentleman.

In the prime and vigor of his expanded mental faculties, Hubert Freeth hardly comprehended natures less intellectually active, less persevering, less ambitious than his own; while there can be no doubt that his forced abidance in the shade, during the years of early manhood, had rendered him now keenly—too keenly—alive to the glittering charms of prosperity. And if with this prosperity—closely allied to it as the contingency of its existence—was the certainty of great personal labor to be performed, why, so much the better for such a temperament as his. For the toil, he argued, was intellectual labor, that would be paid for thrice; in the yellow gold, the want of which had hitherto so cramped his purposes; in the world's applause, and in that personal influence, which is dearer to most men than they are willing to allow. He felt assured that such conditions would eliminate the very atmosphere needed for the expansion and development of his being.

"Needed for the expansion and development of his being!" An oracle like that of Delphos might have propounded the phrase. But the heathen priestess of old always pointed with her indicating finger to far-off results, and shrouded with the cloudy incense of mysticism the tortuous approaches to the goal.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. BRINDLEY CALLED TO THE RESCUE.

CATHERINE FREETH is avowedly engaged to her cousin, Reuben Appersley, and the fact has been duly announced to various relations and a few intimate friends; if not with the forms and ceremonies of the protocols which declare the betrothal of a princess, yet with something of a Tyburnian imitation of the same. The first marriage in a large family of quite young people is always an event that interests friends and acquaintances a little more than the subsequent ones, and calls forth proportionate "felicitations."

Lionel's articles are cancelled, and he is preparing to be entered at the University of Cambridge. Meanwhile, he is recreating himself with a little hard reading, occasional chess-playing with Aline Brindley—he only gives her a rook and a pawn now—and talking with his sister Catherine about Five Oaks and her last visit. He thinks Cousin Reuben an excellent fellow, and a lucky one also, to have won his handsome sister. But the dash of surprise with which he first heard of the engagement has not yet quite worn off.

Gilbert has grown so well used to his watch, that various new wants are looming up to his mind. The little girls are rather idling their time, as the new governess is not to be thought of in the old house. But a mansion in Westminster is already taken, and named Telford House; upholsterers are busy furnishing it,—so busy, indeed, that but for Mrs. Brindley's aid in keeping Mrs.

Freeth's energies alive by timely promptings and friendly persuasions, the little lady might really have succumbed under her new responsibilities.

Mrs. Brindley enjoyed playing the part of adviser and suggester; for her judgment was quick and clear, prompted by the plain, broad aspect of events, and generally undisturbed by that habit of looking all round a subject, which is apt to make even very clever people wavering and undecided. The power of clear and rapid judgment was just what Mrs. Freeth at present valued, and often leaned on, in her friend. She yielded in most things to Mrs. Brindley's shrewder nature, to her supposed knowledge of the world, to her even cheerfulness, and to that ever-ready but indescribable tact which society tacitly rewards in a thousand unmistakable ways. Moreover, as Hubert Freeth thought highly of their friend's judgment, his wife, by acting on it, felt partially relieved from responsibility; and this was frequently a compensation for having her own wishes thwarted.

Mrs. Brindley was often called kind-hearted; perhaps because she had a good-natured readiness in performing slight services; but she never made herself miserable about other people's troubles, simply because she was deficient in imaginative sympathy. She did not enthrone the thought of a sorrow in her mind, and then turn upon it colored glasses and magnifying lens. Nay, in the case of her own troubles, she had wrestled with them, and trampled them down, and always dwarfed them as ideas. And she was too equable in disposition to be hard or severe except in the cases where the granite of her self esteem or strong will had been rudely struck.

She would never have made such an admirable poor man's wife as Mrs. Freeth had done. She would have wearied of the monotony of the daily routine, of the domestic drudgeries, of the home life that must be led, of the gray atmosphere of her surroundings. She was aware of



the fact, and was therefore able, with sincerity, to compliment her friend on her past career,—without finding it necessary to add that she thought herself the better able to spend a large income judiciously.

But sovereigns and their prime ministers do sometimes disagree, though their alliance may have been, for a given time, very harmonious. Mrs. Freeth yielded with a tolerably good grace to the purchase of furniture more costly than she considered necessary, and comforted herself with the idea that it was still property. It was touching the engagement of servants that she and Mrs. Brindley strongly differed, and that the sovereign mistress asserted her prerogative and proclaimed a "veto." She—such a manager as she was—would never throw authority out of her own hands by engaging people who—as you could see at a glance—would not condescend to be taught; not to mention the extravagance of the wages demanded. And when Mrs. Brindley suggested that it was desirable for her to have servants who did not require teaching, and that the difference of cost was more apparent than real, Mrs. Freeth answered irritably, and her adviser offered no further opinion.

Had Mrs. Freeth realized to herself what was the truth, right principle would have prevailed in spite of any temporary mortification to ensue. But she was not introspective, and did not analyze the sort of shy fear she felt; shy fear of those well-mannered upper servants who applied in answer to her advertisement, and seemed so much more at home in a fine house than she did. But, in reality, efficient, well-trained servants are by no means to be had for the seeking, and least of all are they eager to aid in the forming of a new establishment. A mistress with wider experience than poor Mrs. Freeth could boast might have had her troubles on the occasion; though, doubtless, they would have been less momentous.

Before the family had been a month in the new house,

Mrs. Brindley was called almost despairingly to the rescue. The new servants were incompetent; their mistress found herself incapable of training them to duties which were new to herself, and the blunderings of the cook on the occasion of the first dinner-party brought matters to a crisis.

Hubert Freeth had wished his party to be a success,—it was a miserable failure. Not that the guests cared so very much about the soup being cold, and the sauces bad, and the made dishes common,—for there is a spice of evil in human nature which finds consolation under such circumstances in thinking, "We do things better." But the host was mortified as he perceived a succession of disasters, and chilled in spirits, so that he could not guide the conversation as was his wont. His wife felt that something was gravely wrong, and it was in vain she tried to check her apprehensions. The evening dragged on wearily, and for the first time in her life she dreaded being alone with her husband.

As the time for this crisis drew near, new causes for her terror accumulated. In the drawing-room guests first tasted the thick and nauseous coffee, perhaps silently admired the pattern of the china, but put down their cups only half emptied. The young and inexperienced Catherine saw vaguely that something was wrong; and using instinctively a subtle gift which goes so far in making the brilliant woman of society, she flitted from one lady guest to another, some little gracious speech appropriate to each individual being ever ready on her tongue.

People who have not this gracious gift are very apt to call it by hard names, and talk emphatically against flattery and insincerity; but, in truth, no egotistic or selfish person can possess it, and there need be no insincerity in its use. Cannot the same woman honestly like music and painting and poetry, and be interested in horticulture and infant-schools and semi-political social questions? And

why should she make conversation a dull game of "cross questions and crooked answers" by talking of the right things to the wrong persons?

But the crowning disaster of the evening was discovered as the last lady was departing. A stupid housemaid, unused to the care of costly garments, had dropped tallow—yes, tallow—on a cashmere cloak, and though the well-bred owner, with many "oh, never minds," tried to smile away Mrs. Freeth's distress, as the hostess herself assisted to remove the dreadful flakes, it was evident that the evil taint was nauseous to her in the extreme. She breathed more freely when Catherine had poured half a bottle of eau-de-cologne about the lining.

A servant was fastening the street door as Mr. Freeth said, "Good-night, my pet," kissing Catherine's cheek the moment afterward, and his daughter knew it was her father's way of dismissing her for the night. And then Hubert Freeth closed the drawing-room door behind him, and the dreaded moment had arrived.

I do not mean to say that the Freeths had never had a mutual fray of temper, never a little swift dispute which left the matrimonial atmosphere all the clearer afterward, like a sudden shower in April, which shows the serene unchanged blue sky the next minute. But Hubert Freeth had never before been deeply vexed by the conduct of his wife, and he had now a strange feeling at his heart which made him hope that he should be able to restrain himself, —able not to say bitter words, which, because of their truth-elements, would never be forgotten.

No doubt it was a "smallness" in a sensible man to be thus gravely annoyed at the trivial mischances of a dinner-party; but I am afraid it was a smallness of which greater men than Hubert Freeth might have been guilty. For the true Englishman is a social and sociable creature, generally given, more or less, to ostentation in his hospitalities, and keenly alive to ridicule. And we must remember that

Hubert Freeth was just beginning to move freely in a desired and congenial sphere, from which poverty had hitherto, in some measure, debarred him.

"Bessie," he exclaimed, leaning his arm on the corner of the mantel-piece, and looking down at his wife, who was bending her head over her lap, and smoothing out the lace border of her handkerchief,—"Bessie, this must never occur again."

"What must never occur again?" replied the wife in a trembling voice, which showed that she was at least unused to artifice or subterfuge.

"Tush!—such a question is unworthy of you," said her husband; and he continued: "You know as well as I do that everything has gone wrong,—although I told you to spare no trouble, no cost, that the dinner and attendance should be perfect. I think I never was so mortified in my life."

"You say everything, Hubert," exclaimed Mrs. Freeth, catching as it were at a straw. "I am sure I heard several gentlemen praising the wines."

"With which you had nothing to do. Bessie, you must get a better cook; and give that girl who spoilt the cloak her wages, and send her off tomorrow."

"Oh, Hubert!" sobbed Mrs. Freeth.

"Well, if you care for the girl so much, make a scullery wench of her; but don't let her touch a shawl or cloak belonging to my friends again."

"*Your* friends!" exclaimed Mrs. Freeth, with bitterness at least equal to his own, and emphasizing the pronoun.

"Well—*your* friends then—our friends—the terms ought to be synonymous. But that disaster reminds me; I am sure I heard Mrs. Brindley recommending you to use only wax lights; why do you not follow her advice?"

"Hubert, *do* you know what wax candles cost?"

"No; but I see that families in our station use them.

If they are a guinea apiece, say so, and then I shall, perhaps, limit the quantity to be consumed."

Mrs. Freeth pushed back her hair from her forehead in agonized amazement. This ironical spirit was something quite new, and for which she was not yet prepared; and it seemed a million times harder to endure than sharp petulance. Had she been a "woman of spirit," she would doubtless have paid back her husband in something like his own coin; but she was nothing of the sort. She was simply a loving wife of gentle nature—only to be angered through her affections—but over careful, painfully timid, altogether narrowed by past circumstances; and with sympathies which appeared mainly engrossed by her own family. It was with a passionate burst of tears that she threw herself among the sofa cushions, exclaiming,—

"Oh, that the last three months were a dream; oh, that we were back in our old home, with only the old faces about us!"

"Don't talk so foolishly," said Mr. Freeth, yielding a little from the severity of his manner. "Bessie, don't talk like a simpleton. I cannot forget, though you may, painful privations and humiliations, of which I am heartily glad to be rid. I remember the days when our only trouble was want of means; when, if we had 'but money'—that was the phrase—we were to be the happiest people in the world. And now that we have not only money, but friends, crowding about us—"

"Friends!" cried Mrs. Freeth, with all the emphasis of interjection.

"Yes, friends; I mean what I say," continued Hubert Freeth. "I am only just now able to form congenial friendships—"

"Friendships!"

"Friendships and acquaintanceships," he proceeded, "if I must be so explicit. And, indeed, social intercourse may be very pleasant without its ties being sentimentally

stringent. I say people of honor and station are willingly our associates; the world treats us with consideration; our children are full of promise; no carking care is casting its shadow near us; and all I ask from you is to be happy yourself, and gracious and liberal—"

"'Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die,'—I have heard you quote those words before now."

"Bessie, I don't deserve this from you. I might retort, and warn you about the 'heed for tomorrow,' and Who has forbidden it."

"I wish I were dead,—I wish I had died when Lucy was born, rather than live to find you so cruel!" exclaimed the wife between fresh sobs.

This little speech was a sharp arrow, and it went home; for Mrs. Freeth had been thought near death at the time to which she alluded. Hubert Freeth moved to the side of his wife, lifted her head from the cushions, and said,—

"Bessie, Bessie, I am not cruel, but I must be firm. I have not wished to say severe things, but it seems to me that gentle hints and mild persuasions are of no avail. I do not wish to interfere with your domestic management; my mind, as you well know, is fully occupied with far different things. Still, within the last few weeks I have expressed my opinion many times. I have perceived many shortcomings,—but I hoped each time that you understood me, and that things were going to be altered. Now I speak once for all,—I must have the house quite differently managed."

Mrs. Freeth thought she could bear anything her husband might say, now that he was more tender; now that he had kissed her, and thrown his arms round her. She was weeping still, but she looked up in his face as she said: "Hubert, what is it I must do?"

"The small details have to be considered. How would you like," he continued, "how would you like Catherine to be installed manager of the house?"

"My own child to be set above me!" exclaimed Mrs. Freeth, shrinking instinctively from all that the suggestion implied.

"Well, well, not if you see the plan from that point of view. Only, I could not help noticing tonight how greatly she has profited by her few opportunities of good society. It seemed to me that there was no one in the room who appeared more thoroughly well bred; and she was so ready, so *à propos* in all she said and did; certainly, the whole thing would have been a still greater failure but for her."

"But what can she know about managing a great house like this?" replied the mother; "and, besides, in a few months, I suppose we shall be preparing for her marriage; and—and—no, Hubert, don't put my daughter as adviser over me. I could not bear it, indeed I could not."

"Well, then, have a professed housekeeper."

"And be robbed right and left!" returned the wife.

"Indeed, indeed that does not follow."

"Oh, Hubert, how should you know! Why, I declare, I would rather sink into the mere housekeeper myself, and give up visiting altogether, than submit to such a proceeding."

"What you suggest, Bessie," replied her husband, "would be highly improper, if it were not, happily, quite out of the question. I wish you to consider your days of drudgery entirely over. I wish you to have a certain amount of leisure in which to read and improve your mind; at any rate, to keep yourself *au courant* of the general topics of the day."

"Ah, I saw you were vexed because I knew nothing about that letter in the *Times*. How could I read the paper this morning, with such a party to prepare for, and when I made every bit of pastry with my own hands!"

"That is just what you had no business to do," replied Mr. Freeth, stamping his foot in the irritation of the moment.

"Once you would not touch the pastry unless I made it!"

Mrs. Freeth fancied this rebuke must be unanswerable; but she found herself mistaken.

"Once!" retorted Mr. Freeth. "Yes, when there was no alternative between your doing such things, and the hands of a maid of all work. Now that I pay a cook forty pounds a year—"

"No, you don't," cried Mrs. Freeth quickly. "I did not engage the woman you are thinking about."

"I am sorry for it. That accounts for a great deal which has happened today. Well, well," he continued, after a pause and a sigh, "you must think over what I have said. There must be a new leaf turned some way. I recommend you for the present to be guided entirely by Mrs. Brindley. If you could get her to stay with you for a little while—"

"No, Hubert, no; don't ask that. I am sick of hearing Mrs. Brindley's name. I suppose you think her quite perfection. I wonder what she would have done with seven children and such an income as ours was. She said herself one day that she never could have made the appearance I did."

"Quite true, I have no doubt,—and a proof that she has not all your good qualities; but it was gracious of her to admit the fact nevertheless."

"There,—of course you praise her. She knows enough of Indian ways and foreign ways; but what does she know about English housekeeping?"

"You forget," replied Mr. Freeth, "you forget that she spent some time in England when her husband came home on sick-leave; and, besides that, she was brought up in England. Why, you yourself were thankful for her advice not many weeks ago. As for the experience which travelling has given her, it seems to me of just the character which—don't be angry with me, Bessie—of just the char-

acter as that which you want. She has acquired a ready tact, which enables her to adapt herself to new situations, without murmuring about trifles."

"It is easy enough not to murmur, with only one child who obeys her implicitly, and with no husband to please or displease," said the wife.

"Then am I and our young flock only so many incumbrances?" asked Hubert Freeth, with rather a bitter smile.

"Oh, Hubert!" exclaimed Mrs. Freeth, throwing herself into his arms in a paroxysm of tears; "oh, Hubert, how cruel, how shockingly cruel, you are to me tonight!"

"Well, well," returned the husband, "let us both forgive and forget the naughty things we have said. There, there, you will be calm in the morning after a night's rest, and able to decide on many things that must be done."

Forgive! yes. The wrath toward those we love,—that wrath which "works like madness in the brain," we may bury fathoms deep, drowning the life out of it in the brine of tears; but there is a plummet of memory that will, in sad or unheeded hours, drop down and touch for an instant the ghastly thing, and send a shudder through the heart. And at such hours we know that to "forget" is not within the compass of our will. A tritely true saying, verily; and yet is there not something awful in the thought, that of all our faculties, memory seems the one most clearly and distinctly touched by the Divine Hand? How often do we say in our pride, "I will remember," and straightway we forget. In our sorrow we murmur, "Oh, would that I could forget!" and the murmuring of the wish compels us to remember.

Perhaps we are more tenderly dealt with than we know, and that withered branches of sorrow, such as bear no fruit, no acorns of experience, no apples of wisdom, have been burnt out of memory, to trouble us no more. How shall we tell that this is not one of the multitudinous mercies for

which, from their very nature, we do not "remember" to be grateful?

With the calm, wakeful hours of a new day came full mutual forgiveness. But if Hubert Freeth and his wife could not "forget" this the most serious disagreement of their married life, perhaps it was because it ought to be a fruit-bearing sorrow, which should teach him tolerance; and her, trust.

Notwithstanding Mrs. Freeth's over-night resistance to the plan, she did call in Mrs. Brindley's assistance, and so far profited by her advice, that no such *fiasco* as that of the first dinner-party ever occurred again. But the price which Mrs. Freeth paid for having this world-experienced and shrewder woman than herself to lean on, was, that Mrs. Brindley became an influence in the house; and I take it that any extraneous influence dropped into a household on merely worldly—so-called prudent—considerations is pretty sure to be a sort of serpent's egg, that will get hatched some day or other, perhaps in an unexpected way!

CHAPTER VII.

A PLIGHTED PAIR.

IT was not that parental affection had exaggerated Catherine's ready tact and grace of manner. She had profited by her opportunities of mental and social culture in a remarkable degree; nor had these opportunities been altogether contemptible. With the view of qualifying her, if need be, to instruct her younger sisters, she had been carefully educated; first at home, and afterward, for a year or two, at a very superior school. Here she had formed girlish acquaintanceships, which had rendered her a welcome visitor in two or three families of consideration. In more than one case she had been admitted to a house where there was refined hospitality without ostentation, and where learning was apparent without pedantry. Thus Catherine, young as she was, had already acquired a certain experience of society which prevented her from being dazzled by the outward show of worldly prosperity.

Perhaps young people are not so much imitative as open, in all their receptive faculties, to the various influences which are to combine and fashion forth the individual character. Catherine never consciously imitated any one; but she was wonderfully ready to appreciate the best points of character and the best traits of manner; and all the knowledge which came to her she seemed to assimilate and make her own. It was the spring in her own nature—however enriched by tributaries—from which her charming manner flowed; that nature which, with all its bright intelligence, was humble with the humility of a thoroughly

unselfish character. Really, Mrs. Freeth might have done worse than yield the reins of government to her eldest daughter.

But though the mother's natural pride prevented Catherine from having nominal authority, she was, in reality, a power in the house. Every one recognized the sunshine of her presence, and, I believe, speculated on the difference her marriage would make in the family. It was she who somehow lightened the burden when "mamma" seemed oppressed by her multitudinous engagements; she who never forgot any of "papa's" behests, but quietly took care that they were obeyed; she it was who was Lionel's regular correspondent now that he was at Cambridge; and she was the first who, in solicitude for Phœbe and Jane, suspected the incompetence of the new governess. Busy also she was in many sweet womanly ways, for Mr. Freeth was liberal in his allowance of money, awarding her, for pocket-money, just twice the sum which her mother thought necessary; and Catherine soon discovered that a wise benevolence is not to be exercised without trouble. But, then, trouble, taken in such a cause, surely bears interest in the lessons of life it teaches!

No wonder that friends, now and then remembering her betrothal, said that she did not look like an engaged girl. Now and then remembering,—for, as there was very little happening to draw attention to the fact, it seemed to fade out of mind with a good many people. Even on the two or three occasions when Reuben Appersley spent a few days in London, her manner of life was but little altered.

To be sure, his absolute devotion, his eagerness to spend every hour by her side, touched her heart, and brought tears of gratitude to her eyes; Reuben thought they were tears of sweet womanly affection, and kissed them away with a passionate rapture which rather frightened her. In his lover's mood, her will was his law,—he would go wherever she suggested, and do whatever she wished;



even yield to his mother's entreaty to shorten his stay in "horrid London," if Catherine commanded him so to do. But must he,—must he really abide by his promise to wait for his bride a whole year It was almost too cruel.

"But, dear Reuben," she replied, to some such question as this, "you remember that you promised not to hurry me; and indeed there are so many reasons why I should remain a little longer at home—so many more reasons than there were a few months ago—that I cannot, no, I cannot humor you."

As she spoke, he was folding her hand in both of his, but she was looking up in his face with a smile on her own countenance.

"Many more reasons for delay," he answered, with a sigh; "and they seem to me all reasons that point the other way. I am frightened lest you should grow to like London society—"

"Reuben, I do like London society," she exclaimed, interrupting him; "and I have often told you so. And you must not forget that you have promised to bring me to town every year. I must see the picture galleries and—"

"Yes, yes; I know all that. But I dread your liking society too well; I dread some jackanapes—some fellow that lolls against drawing-room doors, and airs his scented handkerchief to show its fineness—"

"Reuben!" And Catherine drew away her hand as she spoke, really hurt at his words.

"Well, well; I cannot help dreading that such peacocks may be brought into contrast with me. I have none of their gifts, but they are gifts which charm some women; and there is a demon of jealousy at the bottom of my heart, which I wish to be left sleeping."

"Oh, Reuben, I do not deserve this; give me up at once if you distrust me!" And she moved to a little distance, with just that touch of haughtiness, which was a new grace in the eyes of such a man as Reuben Appersley.

"Forgive me—forgive me!" he exclaimed, as he flung himself before her; "only this once, tell me this once that you love me—love me, and think of me with love when you are surrounded by those flatterers, and I will never say such words again."

Catherine looked her candid answer; but that was not enough. He sued for speech, and dictated the words he wished to hear.

Catherine called to mind that it had been said the making up of a lover's quarrel was the renewal of love. But she denied the truth of the proverb. She wished she had never heard of that sleeping jealousy at the bottom of Reuben's heart. Sleeping things are sometimes so easily and so accidentally awakened; and she had a vague idea that a loving heart should be ruled by an angel of confidence, which would keep no lair in which jealousy could slumber.

Then his remarks about London society drew her attention to the fact that he was certainly different, in various respects, from many individuals whom she had found herself admiring. But people, of any worth of character, always appear to immense advantage in their own homes; and until quite lately Catherine had known her cousin almost entirely through her long visits to Five Oaks. In early childhood he had been the "young squire," with an incipient and not quite conscious authority, which enabled him to exercise what seemed childish generosities without much self-denial. And up to the present day even, there was no one in his own immediate neighborhood who was, in the least, likely to be brought into favorable comparison with him, so far as the graces were concerned.

The only "gentlemen" within many miles were the clergyman and the doctor. The Rev. Joah Darwin was the incumbent of a straggling parish, having in middle age succeeded to a college living. He had been sizer, and then fellow, and for a dozen years engaged to the patient and frugal-minded lady who, at length, became his wife. Pa-

tient and frugal-minded she had need still to be, for the stipend of the cure was small, and three little olive-branches had made their appearance as speedily as possible; while in the far-spreading agricultural district of which he was the spiritual pastor, there was always too much trouble of one sort or another—trouble, however, which always seemed to ask for material help—for him to have a spare loaf in his house, spare wine in his cellar, or a spare sovereign in his pocket.

But the good clergyman and his wife were enviably happy, nevertheless,—as people must be who, having seen that there are for themselves clearly-defined and very noble duties, have set about performing those duties in the spirit which recognizes them as privileges. The Rev. Joah Darwin was plain in person, and shy, of almost awkward manners in general society, though he was easy and eloquent enough in humble cottages or in sick-chambers.

Mrs. Appersley had a singular, yet not inexplicable prejudice against "country apothecaries," so that the homely but skilful Mr. Goodfield was never called in at Five Oaks, but under the pressure of sudden illness, and never courted as a visiting acquaintance. Mrs. Appersley had very painful recollections of a country apothecary, but his name had been Otway.

The reader will easily understand how Reuben Appersley must have appeared to greater advantage among his own people, who looked up to a just and kind master as the pattern of gentlemanlike perfection, than he could do in a metropolitan circle of acquaintances, whose thoughts were not his thoughts, and whose tastes were often opposite to his. It is painful to reflect that many men whose shining cast the "country gentleman" into the shade, might be, and often were, morally, and even mentally, his inferiors; but there is a charm about the perfect *savoir faire* of polished society which wins its way, and always influences refined minds more or less perceptibly.

The Freeths were now in polished and refined society, and, indeed, Hubert Freeth had never himself fallen quite out of its grooves. His professional talents had brought him into contact with the scientific minds of the age, and he had been a frequent guest of peers as well as of commoners of distinction. Men of intellectual powers generally require the invigoration of congenial society; but very early in his married life, Mr. Freeth had recognized the impossibility of his wife entering into society under the then existing circumstances. He was too proud a man to plead poverty in a lachrymose vein, but he was brave enough to be able to say, "I cannot afford," on proper occasions; while he had a very happy manner of excusing his wife from accepting invitations, on the plea of her maternal duties, without insinuating, in the slightest degree, that he was ashamed of his Bessie. It was surprisingly easy to have it understood that Hubert Freeth was not tied to his wife's apron-string; for modern society is so breathlessly busy with its own urgent and immediate affairs, that it cannot run into the next street after a merely modest, unobtrusive gentlewoman. If she appears on society's doorstep, properly presented, that is another thing.

Now, it must be remembered that Mrs. Freeth was the mother of a marriageable daughter before she was so presented; and women verging on forty are slow to learn new habits of thought, and new methods of life. She had made the home into one which only about half a dozen choice friends were ever invited, a haven of rest; but she found herself shy and troubled in a crowd of new acquaintances, and morbidly excited about trifles. After a few months had passed by, Hubert Freeth was constrained to own that his Bessie looked weary and careworn, and seemed far less happy than she had been in the days of comparative poverty.

On himself, also, there had come some new and unexpected troubles. Places of honor and influence are seldom



softly cushioned, and, in addition to his professional responsibilities, he found himself beset by eager applicants for employment, encouragement, and more mysterious sorts of patronage. Though he had dropped many cares and burdens, he had certainly lifted up others; and it was only because he was better fitted than ordinary men to be a chief and a leader, that he did not sink under them.

CHAPTER VIII.

HESTER OTWAY.

"MAMMA," said Catherine Freeth one morning to her mother, "I have just received a letter from Hester Otway, telling me that she is going to leave Lady Danvers, in the autumn; and she asks me to remember her, should we, in the course of the summer, hear of any one requiring such a governess as herself. Now, mamma, dear, would it not be delightful for you to engage her for Phœbe and Jane, instead of having another stranger?"

"I am sure it would please me very much," replied Mrs. Freeth; "for you know, my dear, how I dislike having strangers about the house; but I remember hearing that Miss Otway had a hundred a year salary, and I do not see how I could offer her less than she has been accustomed to expect."

"Why, mamma, should you think of doing such a thing? On the contrary, I should offer her, on account of her experience, more than she has been receiving, instead of less; for the great pleasure of having money is that one can be liberal."

"That is just the way your papa talks," said Mrs. Freeth, with a slight acerbity of tone; "I am sure he need be made of money just now. And, really, Catherine, you should study economy a little more than you do. If you were not engaged to a man of fortune, I should quite tremble for you; and, as it is, I do not think you should expect Reuben to have the same views about money as your father seems to have."



"Reuben is very generous; he has not a mean thought," replied Catherine, blushing at this necessity of defending him, but looking down and playing with her watch-chain to conceal her emotion.

"That may be," returned Mrs. Freeth; "but you cannot expect he will supply you with money whenever you ask for it."

"*When* I ask for it, he will give it me," said Catherine, gravely; "but," she continued, after a slight pause, "but that is not the question now, mamma. We all know Hester Otway, and like her, and she must be a good governess, or she would not have stayed so many years with Lady Danvers."

"Why is she leaving?" asked Mrs. Freeth.

"Because her pupil is considered 'finished,'" replied Catherine, smiling at the ideas suggested by the last word. Two years ago, Catherine herself had been declared "finished." Yet now she comprehended that professed teachers very seldom do more than set the young mind on the track for acquiring information; and she thought if her old acquaintance could stimulate Phœbe to higher tastes than she had yet evinced, and could, at the same time, point out the fountains of knowledge, and satisfy the daintier thirst of little Jane, that Hester Otway would be like sunshine in the household.

It was a curious trait in Mrs. Freeth's character that her "penny-wise" suggestions for economy generally proceeded from her first impulses, and that she could often either reason herself, or be persuaded, into more liberal measures. From this it is fair to infer that whatever her apparent narrowness, conscience never slumbered or cheated itself in her heart. It was conscience that had once taught her to be penurious, and the habit of twenty years' growth was not yet shaken off. Very soon Catherine's arguments prevailed, and she was permitted to answer Hester's letter by return, and suggest the arrangement she so much desired.

And here it may be well explicitly to state that the vexed question of the "governess's" rights and wrongs is not likely to be even mentioned in these pages. It happened that Hester's dependent position did not give the chief coloring to her life. Hitherto, she had fulfilled her difficult duties with ability and discretion; and it had not been her lot to be insulted by her employers, or commiserated by their servants; she had never been denied the requirements of a gentlewoman, or treated with other than courteous consideration. She had not fallen in love with her pupil's brother, or, by her superior accomplishments, rendered the lady of the house miserably jealous. In her governess capacity there was really no material for romance; and when the day came for her to leave a certain baronial residence, which for three years had been her home, lookers-on would have seen, at a glance, that a whole family were parting from a much-loved friend.

Hester Otway, it is true, was only the daughter of a country medical practitioner; but the very troubles of her family had snatched her from the narrowing influences of provincial society, such as it was thirty years ago. It had been a clearly-defined truth from her very early years, that Hester must "get her own living;" and well-to-do, rather than wealthy relatives, had trained her to a profession as regularly and completely as if the woman's chief chance in life's lottery—as if marriage—was not to be calculated on as a probability that would disturb her honorable labors.

George Otway had lived and practised in a country town, within a few miles of Five Oaks. He was a man of respectable family, and once of good private fortune; but he, like Reuben Appersley's father, had sporting tastes, and was better known in connection with the turf than became his position. He and Mr. Appersley were, indeed, boon companions and intimate acquaintances, perhaps friends, according to their mutual capacity for friendship.

George Otway had been Mr. Appersley's sole medical

attendant, in the sudden illness of which—under peculiarly painful and mysterious circumstances—he died. No blame was attached to Mr. Otway's treatment of his patient; on the contrary, he was complimented, at the inquest, on the skill he was supposed to have evinced; and, certainly, Mr. Appersley's death affected him as a deep personal affliction; yet the widow neither showed nor expressed gratitude for his services.

It is true she had never liked him; always believing that he encouraged her husband in his betting propensities and sporting habits; and when, a few weeks after her own loss, George Otway absconded, leaving his wife and little daughter to the tender mercies of some distant relatives, and his lawful creditors to share his effects among them, the proud Mrs. Appersley seemed to have no pity for a widowhood which some people thought more sorrowful than her own.

As for Mr. Otway's "debts of honor," perhaps rumor exaggerated, perhaps underrated, them. The true balance-sheet of those "liabilities" would not have been edifying to contemplate—save as a warning. And, somehow, those who most need such warnings, never will receive them. Gamblers of all denominations, for the most part work—as the pestilence walketh—in darkness; and I suppose no statistician will ever approximate to a knowledge of the sums of which wives and sisters and children are, day by day, morally defrauded to minister to the craving for excitement of betting men. The habitual gambler is as incurable as the drunkard, save by the total abstinence system.

George Otway, or a man supposed to be he, was traced to London; but in the crowded thoroughfares of the metropolis, the clue was lost. A vigilant policeman believed he had found it again, in a boat that put off from Gravesend to overtake an Australian merchantman that had just weighed anchor. But descriptions were so contradictory, and the owners of the ship were so positive that no such

person had sailed in it, that, by degrees, strong suspicion faded into vague conjecture.

From the morning when he had left his wife with a calm kiss, as if going forth merely on his daily round of visits, and when his little daughter of four years' old had shrunk away frightened from his too tight hug and the rough chin which pressed against her cheek, George Otway, the handsome, jovial doctor, had never been heard of in any authentic manner. His poor wife met with kind friends, and never really wanted for the necessaries and even comforts of life; but, as years passed on, she grew heartsick with hope deferred, and heart-darkened by living in the shadow of disgrace. She faded and faded away, like plants which are kept in a chill and murky atmosphere, and died when Hester was barely twelve years old.

No one had ever been so cruel as to paint for Hester Otway her father's history in its darkest colors; yet she knew enough to show her that she had been reared under the influence of a mysterious trouble, and that on her devolved the duty not only of keeping personally free from blame, but of wiping off, if possible, the stigma of hereditary blots. It was when visiting old friends in the old neighborhood, that in latter times she had met Reuben Appersley; and perhaps it was the certainty that he knew her history intimately, and yet treated her with that indescribable attention and respect with which a man can mark his admiration of a woman, without a vocal utterance of it, which touched her heart, and kindled her imagination in regard to all things with which he was concerned.

Hester would have positively disliked Mrs. Appersley had she not been Reuben's mother. But the halo of his seeming perfections stretched far enough to include one so near; therefore, the freezing manner which the elder lady had adopted, as significant of her dislike, Hester interpreted as becoming dignity; and because she was under a subtle but secret spell, she would have waged war with



any one who might have pointed out a fault in Reuben's mother.

Hester's mind presented that curious combination which is sometimes found in highly-cultivated people. She had a large amount of intellectual acquirements, with a great deal of simplicity of character; and probably it was this combination which made her a "good governess," and gave her influence over her pupils. Somehow, most children open out to generous, unsuspicious persons, and are influenced by them in the same sort of way as they are by the heroic characters of books, while they instinctively shrink away from the worldly-wise, as beings with whom they are in an unconfessed antagonism.

Hester was too wholesomely and severely disciplined to be a dreaming sentimentalist; and yet, as week after week, and month after month, had passed by, the impression made had still been deepened. Active as her duties were, they still permitted short reveries; and these had been constantly nourished by winged memory, that was always flinging into the present some shadow of the past.

Hester Otway had but few correspondents; and if any of them happened to be aware of Reuben Appersley's engagement to his cousin, they had not thought fit to mention it. She was wholly ignorant of the circumstance, even when she arrived in London, some months later, and took up her residence in Mr. Freeth's house as governess to his children. Some other events, however, have to be recorded before we can look at Hester in that capacity.

CHAPTER IX.

ALGERNON RAYBROOKE.

ALGERNON RAYBROOKE had been the pet of a select circle during the past season. The pet, not the "lion," seeing that the qualities which, it was confidently predicted, would one day establish him as a leader among men were still in the bud.

Those who had good opportunities of forming an opinion, had always considered him a young man of mark; one who was likely to carve his way to fame and fortune by sheer force of talents and energy of character, backed, as they were, by an ancient and honorable name. Just that moderate fortune was his which makes a man independent with regard to his daily bread, yet sets the prizes of life before him in the alluring light by which shine all the bright things for which we have to strive.

This had been Algernon's position when he was "eating his dinners" at Lincoln's Inn, and, by other mysterious methods, qualifying himself to be a member of the bar. But one February day the sudden death of a young cousin by the upsetting of a felucca in the Mediterranean, rendered him heir-presumptive to a baronetcy, and to a rent-roll of ten thousand a year, provided the present baronet did not bequeath away from him that unentailed property, which, for two generations, had accompanied the title.

The news came to him through that winged sheet which carries, noisily or otherwise, so many messages over the world,—the *Times* newspaper. "How stupid the paper is today!" or, "There's nothing in it!" we often say, be-



cause there happens to be nothing written of just then which touches our particular sympathies, or affects our individual interests. But is there ever a *Times* published that does not make some heart throb with agony, or leap with exultations; some brow flush with honest pride, some strong spirit quail with shame, or some woman weep those bitter tears which furrow the soul? Alas! could it be produced, a sheet so innocent of mischief would be voted duller reading than a school-girl's diary.

Algernon was breakfasting in his chambers when a Mercury, of the order which waits upon bachelor students, brought in the damp newspaper. Its arrival was late that morning; so, instead of sipping his coffee and munching his hot roll while he read, as was his more usual habit, Algernon enjoyed the luxury of coffee and roll unchilled. Therefore, he had nothing to hinder a comfortable drying of the wet sheets by his bright fire, before he drew his cosey chair on to the hearth-rug, and prepared to enjoy that morning draught of news for which an Englishman always pants.

It was before the day when insular England stretched, as it were, a brain-fibre beneath the sea, and linked her mind, by the electric magic, to the mind of all other countries. Wherefore news, though even then partly flashed, travelled more slowly than at present, and it was after much leisurely turning of the paper, and at the end of a semi-political article from Leghorn, that the young barrister read:

"A sad accident has occurred within the last few hours. A party of amateur sailors, caught in a sudden squall, have been drowned just off Spezzia; and one of the bodies already washed on shore has been recognized as that of a young Englishman, only son of Sir Richard Raybrooke, Bart. The bereaved father, who, by the advice of his physician, has been spending the winter at Pisa, and Lady Raybrooke, must, by this time, be acquainted with the melancholy catastrophe."

Now, had this been a little scene before the foot-lights, no doubt the stage directions would have been for Algernon to start from his chair, drop the paper, attitudinize gracefully, and burst into a high-flown soliloquy on the uncertainty of human life, and the caprices of fortune, with spasmodic ejaculations on the change in his own prospects. But Algernon only clutched the paper more tightly, instead of dropping it; read the paragraph in which his kinsman's name stood out in seeming prominence at least three times; and then, instead of talking to himself, leaned back in his chair, in what a looker-on would assuredly have called a brown study.

"Poor Dick!" he thought to himself; "poor light-hearted Dick, the spoilt darling of his parents,—poor Dick, who took life as easily as a butterfly, to die in that ghastly fashion, and so darken all the future of his parents' lives! Will they hate me, I wonder, for standing next in succession? Heaven knows I would try to comfort them if I knew how. But what word or act of mine could seem like genuine sympathy, to be accepted and believed in? Let me do nothing, at any rate, until I have the news more positively confirmed."

Yet, as once again he read the paragraph, he found a clear precision about it, which left but small loop-holes for doubt; and, with the calmness of a mind capable of being deeply stirred, yet which aimed too loftily to be greatly disturbed at the prospect of a remote advantage, however considerable, he recognized, as a truth, the change in his own prospects and position.

"No, there is not such a thing as an accident in the world," he mused, as future probabilities opened out in a long vista before him. "No, everything on earth must be overruled, though it may seem that many lives are to be influenced by, perhaps, the hasty tug of a rope, or a yard too much of canvas spread!"

Perhaps, at the bottom of his heart, a dangerous pride



was roused,—a pride half blasphemous in some of its aspects, and yet in others wearing the garb of grateful humility; a pride that mixed itself with his vague religious persuasions, because, indeed, it infused itself through his whole being.

However, whatever Algernon Raybrooke did, or did not do, with regard to proffering sympathy to his father's cousin, his conduct appeared to give such satisfaction as the bereaved parents were capable of receiving. Sir Richard, not wishing his heir to be other than amply provided for during his life, settled a thousand a year on him at once; and in less than two months, Algernon found himself so well used to his new condition, that the days of his darker fortunes seemed to lie far back in the past.

For, as his fortune had enlarged, and his prospects had grown bright, so, higher and higher, had his ambition soared. Once it had been his intention to devote all his energies to his profession, and rise to distinction on the steep and difficult ladder of forensic practice. Yet ever at his heart a small voice had whispered one ominous refrain. He knew that he was gifted with powers of eloquence; powers needing, it might be, much training and cultivation, but which would always be more or less dependent on the emotions of his heart, as well as on the acumen of his intellect.

Herein was betrayed the bit of womanly clay which had been needed to eke out a somewhat contradictory character. He was sincere even when most wrong headed. His fitful enthusiasms mounted like wine to his brain, not to intoxicate or overthrow, but to set all the fine machinery of subtle reasoning and apt metaphor and forcible illustration at the high pressure, only to be relieved by "words that burn;" whereas, his mind seemed drugged by opiates, when, for the mere exercise of debating, he took up an argument, in which he had not faith, and argued only for argument's sake.

The small voice had whispered that honors and dignities would be hard to reach by a pleader who could only use

dexterously the sharp weapons of speech when fighting under the banner of what he believed to be right and truth. And yet he had set before himself that wellnigh impossible task. Doing so, exemplified the dogged obstinacy and self-will which loved to surmount difficulties that lay in his path.

Now, however, that professional success was not of vital importance, he yearned to devote his mental powers and gifts of eloquence to some cause in the service of which they would never need to be curbed. Very soon he decided that politics presented the best field for the exercise of his energies, and one in which his past legal studies might prove of infinite service. Not only did Sir Richard Raybrooke approve of Algernon's aims, but he furthered the projects of his young kinsman by every means in his power. The result was that a seat in Parliament having become vacant, Algernon Raybrooke was returned for it; not without a sharp contest, but still by a satisfactory majority.

The borough of Fordinghill, for which this young man of four-and-twenty was now a member, was a post-town in Meadshire, in which county Sir Richard had property, and Algernon came in on what was called the Liberal interest. But Fordinghill was in a condition common to many towns a few years ago; for the politics of the electors were finely balanced, and had not the High Tory party been weakened by internal rivalry, and so split its interest by encouraging two candidates, it is likely enough that Algernon would not have been returned.

It was late in the session when he had taken his seat, and with great good sense he had contented himself with listening and observing, and voting according to his principles. Judicious friends approved of his reticence of speech; and when we consider that high hopes of his future had been entertained by his acquaintances before his young cousin's death, it may easily be supposed that his present

expectations acted like a magnifying lens to his merits. In fact, this untried legislator and future orator was now widely credited with the knowledge and erudition, the ready wit and the embryo powers not only of a distinguished parliamentary speaker, but also of a leading statesman.

Had he been of smaller mental mould, Algernon Raybrooke would probably have been spoiled by the petting of pretty women and the general praise and approbation of "society," which lately had been showered on him; but two advantages were his, which, acting like rival magnets, kept him in the safe mid-channel between the Scylla and Charybdis of intellectual and personal vanity.

He had always been considered rich in mental endowments, and from boyhood had been accustomed to the vigorous exercise of his mind; therefore, for great things to be expected from him came rather as a matter of course than with any novelty of idea. Indeed, his confidence in his own powers gave a tinge of haughtiness to his character, though it never degenerated to anything so enervating and transparent as "vanity."

He was handsome; and handsome men and women, when they are tolerably ballasted with brains, generally form the least "vain" section of humanity. For handsome people have no need to fume and fret about the trifles of dress; no need to patronize a fashion because they find it becoming; no need, in fact, to think about their own faces and figures at all.

Somebody calls dressing well—that is, becomingly and appropriately—a "duty to society;" but it is a duty easily performed by handsome people. It is the woman with a snub nose and sallow complexion and round shoulders who finds the toilette arrangements a severe study, and who, in delight at a little success, becomes vain,—vain with that not-so-bad-after-all self-gratulation, which is the most treacherous starting-point from which vanity can rise.

And by some analogous rule they are the unfortunates of the other sex, who study neckties; and patronize advertised hair-dyes; and perseveringly cultivate contumacious whiskers; and have quarrels with their tailors; and, by dint of regarding themselves in small looking-glasses and large, and owning their deficiencies, make happy discoveries about their "good points."

Young Raybrooke, seldom having cause for dissatisfaction with himself, was, it must be admitted, rather a sloven in his dress. Sloven, however, with a reservation, for he always looked fresh, and never seemed to soil like other people. He was adored by his excellent laundress for his munificent patronage, and the credit his fine linen was to her. But he often wore his coats till they were old, though such coats were always of an excellent cut; five times out of six he tied his cravat carelessly, and seldom relinquished a hat till it got damaged. But he had a trick of damaging his hats very soon, and the luck of always getting a new one wetted. Yet nothing made him look shabby; his gloves were never old or soiled; and perhaps he was a little particular about his boots,—I believe the maker used to show them off in his window before sending them home, as patterns of shape and style.

Different people have different notions of what constitutes a handsome man, and of the characteristics which usually make up the darling of society. But Algernon's credentials passed muster with most people. To a fine person, above the middle height, and an animated countenance, was added a manner that was graceful and gracious, and was, at the same time, quite different from that of the dancing-master's deportment school. No one could ever quite surely predict what he would do or say on any particular occasion,—only it might be pretty safely relied on that he would do and say the right thing at the right time. His abundant dark hair, and his fine eyes, that looked almost black sometimes, but were, in reality, dark gray



seemed, somehow, precisely in manly harmony with his rich sonorous voice.

In fact, he was the very opposite of the "loud" dressing *petits maîtres*, blazoned with jewellery, and scented like a perfumer's shop, who, incredible as it may seem, do occasionally find women more foolish than themselves to do them homage.

After Parliament was prorogued, Algernon paid a visit of a month or two to Raybrooke Park, shot a few birds, and made intimate acquaintance with a place destined to be his own; but it was now the middle of October; many people whom he required to see were already in town, and, moreover, he wished to be within reach of the freshest naval intelligence, in order to meet his younger brother, a midshipman in the navy, whose ship, after a long cruise, was daily expected in the Channel.

Frank Raybrooke was a good-looking youth of nineteen, bearing a family likeness to his brother, though his hair was lighter than Algernon's, and his complexion naturally fairer. But he was bronzed by the sunshine of the tropics, and looked older than he was. In some respects, he was matured in character from having knocked about the world, and comprehended early in life the responsibility of having honorable duties to perform; but there was another side of his nature, which retained much of the simplicity and trustfulness of youth. Altogether, he was one of the most prominent young officers in her Majesty's service, and though just now it is rather his *carte de visite* which is offered to the reader than himself duly presented, we shall hear of Frank Raybrooke again.

CHAPTER X.

AT SHINGLEBEACH.

AFTER the gayety of the London season, Mrs. Freeth had pleaded, not for a continental tour or a sojourn at Brighton, but for the family to be taken to a little quiet nook on the east coast, where she could throw off the burden of cares, which, in these latter times, had pressed on her so severely, and, during the yet long summer-days, thoroughly enjoy the sea-side and the country. In her heart, she had grieved over the delicious June evenings spent in hot London drawing-rooms, and memory had gone back fondly to the earlier times, when, as a young and loving couple, she and her husband had made pleasant suburban excursions in a fashion that would have been revolting to the new world into which she was now introduced. She remembered moonlight-nights at midsummer-time, when she had gathered wild flowers in Hampstead districts, or listened to the nightingale not a mile away from the rattling Greenwich train; and Richmond, to her, was an enchanted spot, though she had never eaten a fish-dinner at the "Star and Garter." The river there had seemed to her like one of the rivers of Eden,—which, alas! like those boundary waters, had an opposite shore not Paradisaic, and to which she always had to return.

Verily, Mrs. Freeth had capacities for simple pleasures, and sweet, yet deep enjoyments; but she was too old when caught into the vortex of worldly pleasures and excitements ever to thoroughly enjoy them. Through a woman's best experiences, she had worked out many little problems of

life for herself, and had her little stock of wisdom; but she was not a talker, not one who picks up knowledge through the ear, and, therefore, even not a first-rate listener.

Certainly, so soon as she had her husband's consent to her proposal, she looked forward to the sea-side sojourn with delight, and began making arrangements for it with energy and eagerness. And when Mrs. Freeth found herself comfortably settled at Shinglebeach, reality, for once, equalled expectation.

Fond mothers are always a little anxious concerning their progeny, and Mrs. Freeth was rather *exigeante* about the due amount of bathing and walking, riding and driving, which were considered orthodox occupations. She was a little "fussy" too in her preparations, when she expected "papa" down on a three days' visit; and once, when a birthday coincided with this gala time, the festivities considered appropriate to the occasion taxed the entire resources of the household. After the London scale of expenditures, the Shinglebeach style of living seemed something quiet and soothing; and now, for the first time since the sudden burst of her husband's prosperity, did Mrs. Freeth really appreciate their good fortune, and take pleasure in little indulgences, which had about them the charm of novelty. Little indulgences seemed to her far sweeter than sweeping changes and large expenditures.

Of course, the life of the Freeths at the sea-side was just the one which caricaturists love to make ridiculous; and even with the mother and eldest daughter for central figures, I know it would be a rash boldness to put in any lights and shades that should give the picture a touch of pathos. The mother grew so "bonnie" at the bidding of the sea-breezes, that her husband talked nonsense about hands on the dial of time going backward. Though her eyes still often ached, and rebelled if she overtaxed them, they were as softly bright as ever, and her complexion being good, and her figure *petite*, she looked a young

woman still. And the daughter, an English beauty in the perfection of her maiden bloom, with, neverthless, that nameless something in her countenance which a physiognomist reads with limited prevision,—seeing only that for the soul allied to such a face there is a real human life to be led, its rocks skirted or dashed against, its depths sounded, its storms to be encountered.

Now, there is both poetry and pathos in such a group lounging or reading, the children chattering and playing, while the "cruel, crawling sea" comes up to their feet as quietly as hour follows hour in each quickly-passing day, the waves dashing the spray in their sunburned faces, as if for a warning of old ocean's power. But the caricaturist sees nothing but eccentric head-gear, and long, lank tresses and stereotyped styles of human beings. In these days, when, as art-themes, pure domestic developments of character seem passing to the limbo of Arcadian shepherds and shepherdesses, and when, as a crowning achievement, a comic rendering of the Pentateuch should, perhaps, be expected to issue from the press, it would need a new St. George to poise a lance against the dragon of burlesque,—that dragon which really seems drawing to its maw, more or less successfully, the freshness and faith and fervor of a generation.

The eight or nine weeks spent at Shinglebeach formed a period of mental development to Catherine. It was a time of real leisure to her, in which she followed her instincts much as a bee does in roaming from flower to flower. She read much, and reflected, perhaps, still more. She was not fond of letter-writing, and, consequently, had few correspondents, though she wrote a good letter on a real occasion for one; and had she lived a century earlier, when every woman of more than ordinary ability was expected to furnish folios of gossip to absent friends, and was forgiven all sins of pedantry, she would probably have been a noted letter-writer. But with the "polite" letter-writer's

inevitable egotism, she would not have been quite the same Catherine Freeth that she now was.

Of course, she wrote frequently to her Cousin Reuben; and chatty, cheerful, affectionate epistles they were which flowed naturally from her pen. Apparently, he thought them matchless pieces of composition, and he was eloquent in his praises of them, eloquent from hearty earnestness of expression; and Catherine was angry with herself that, on one or two occasions, she had been dissatisfied with his letters, because—because some sentence of passionate love had in it a word misspelt.

Now, a well-educated girl can forgive such a solecism in a friend, but in a lover—not. In the next letter she introduced the word twice, writing it very legibly; of course, he never noticed the difference—bad orthographers never do—but I think the unteachableness evinced by this want of observation offended her more than the original fault. And, again, she was angry with herself for her own displeasure; till, by an effort of the will, memory gathered, as it were, into a focus his many noble qualities and manly clevernesses, and she argued to herself that it would have been a greater defect to ride awkwardly than to spell "separate" with three 'e's.' Certainly, she thought of Reuben, and thought of her engagement much more than she had done while she was in town.

"Mamma," said Catherine, after a long pause, "do you not love the sea? Do you not think that coming here is the richest enjoyment papa has yet given us?"

They were sitting on the beach at the time, the younger members of the family playing about or sauntering near, Mrs. Freeth knitting rather lazily, and Catherine with a volume of Tennyson resting on her lap.

"Indeed I do," replied the mother; "and to think that, in all human probability, we shall have such a treat every year of our lives, seems something almost too delightful to believe."

"The children," replied Catherine laughing, "will, I suppose, be better than well, henceforth; for, though we have not seen the sea until now for half a dozen years, we did not suffer in health very dreadfully."

"I wonder if I ever should weary of the sea-side?" she continued, after a slight pause; "I doubt it very much. Day after day, as I sit here, the sea seems to talk to me. Or is it like a great book, that always opens at a fresh chapter?"

"Why, Catherine, you are quite fanciful this morning," returned Mrs. Freeth.

"I cannot help it, mamma. I feel as if I had grown since I have been here; as if the sea were always widening my mind and piquing my curiosity,—hinting at all sorts of secrets, but never more than half revealing them." And then she lifted the little green-covered book from her lap, and read over three or four of her favorite stanzas in "Locksley Hall." Did she picture herself as "Cousin Amy," I wonder—but without Amy's falseness or weakness? Or did she rise to comprehension of the lover's wail and woe?

In truth, Catherine—though she knew it not—had arrived at the most critical epoch in woman's career; that brief period in which youth is just recognized, and its elixir tasted before it vanishes forever! That period in which, for a moment, time's horizon seems stationary, and the future is credited with mysterious joys; when life is coming upon us tumultuously, like a sea that rises higher at every tide, stranding all sorts of memories with every wave,—shells that, though carried far away inland, shall still whisper of the past; curious weeds inextricably tangled; a rounded pebble worth cutting and polishing, and, alas! it may be, some sad token of a far-off wreck. And while we are ignorantly gathering up the spoil and waifs time lays at our feet in youth, a glad song seems sounding in the soul; but soon it is marred by a low discordant voice, and



we find that Hope cannot chant without awakening her sister, Fear!

It was Mrs. Freeth who interrupted Catherine's reading, or reverie, by observing:

"I like Miss Otway's letters very much. She seems to be very sensible, and, I have no doubt, will manage Phœbe and Jane better than I can. If we leave this place at the end of September, we shall be well settled at home, and ready to receive her, by the time she can come."

"Yes," said Catherine; "the girls will have had a long holiday, and the sooner Hester begins her new duties, the better, I think. I expect great things from her, mamma, she is so clever, and has had so much experience in teaching."

"I am thinking," continued Mrs. Freeth, "that we ought to leave off speaking of her by her Christian name. The children must be taught to respect her, and, though it was very well to address her familiarly when she was a school girl; the case is different now."

"Just as you like, mamma. But I am afraid if I call her 'Miss Otway,' she will address me as 'Miss Freeth,' and that would sound very formal. To be sure, she is much the elder, and, of course, has been used to a certain sort of deference. I suppose she must be four-and-twenty by this time. I know she was a great girl when I was a little one."

"I only wish, for the sake of example to the children, to show their governess proper respect," replied the mother; "and whether she calls you Miss Freeth, or not, does not much signify, as you will bear another name so soon." And though a smile was on her face as she spoke, her words were accompanied by a sigh.

Catherine colored, and answered promptly: "Indeed, mamma, I was not thinking of my change of name."

"But, my dear, I think of it very often. For though I

am delighted at your engagement, and would not for the world have your marriage needlessly delayed, of course I dread losing you."

"Dear mamma," said Catherine tenderly, and laying her hand on her mother's arm as she spoke; "dear mamma, Phœbe and Jane are growing up fast to fill my place—"

"But they are different from you," interrupted Mrs. Freeth; "or perhaps it is that no child can be like an eldest daughter."

"Also, none like the youngest!" exclaimed Catherine laughing; "I heard you say so the other day, when we were all praising little Lucy."

"Did I say so? Well, perhaps I did. Still, your being the eldest does make a difference."

"A difference—yes," returned the daughter; "and certainly Lionel and I must always be able to compare former times with now, in a manner the younger ones never can. But as for my marriage, mamma, I do not see that it need make much of a separation; I am sure I shall persuade Reuben to be often in London; and then you and papa must come every autumn to Five Oaks, and that will be perfectly delightful."

"I wonder where we shall all be this time twelvemonth?" mused Mrs. Freeth.

"Sitting by the sea-shore, I hope, as we are now," said Catherine gayly; "and by that time I shall probably be wiser, and be better able to understand the mutterings and the roarings—" but she checked herself, lest it should again be said that she was quite fanciful, and, besides, her eye was attracted by the majesty of the flowing tide, which was coming in rapidly, and though the weather was calm, one giant wave rolled on, and shattered its crest with such force that mother and daughter were drenched with the spray.

"I declare that was quite spiteful," said Catherine, shaking her mantle, and drawing her mother higher up on



the beach; "just as I was thinking that wave, rising like a concave emerald, was the most glorious one I had ever seen."

"I suppose that is just the way the sea served Canute!" exclaimed little Teddy, whose elementary knowledge of English history was remarkably recent and ready. "Look, mamma, the next wave will fill up my dyke, and wash away all my fortifications. After all, it is stupid work digging in the sand!" And as he spoke, the child threw down his wooden spade with a gesture half of weariness, half of disgust.

Mrs. Freeth picked up the little spade; somehow she could not help noticing that the hollow which Teddy had scooped and called his dyke, looked just like a grave.

"Mamma," continued the little fellow, "you said the other day that papa was building up a great wall of mud and stone to keep the water out of a sort of dyke. I want to know how he does it."

"You had better ask Gilbert; he knows all about it, I dare say," replied the mother.

"I did ask him, mamma; but he said I was too young to understand; and he would not tell me what is to be done when I come to sand; one cannot build anything on sand.

Mrs. Freeth remembered Who it was that had warned us against sandy foundations; but a certain shy reverence prevented her from "improving the occasion," or pointing the moral of her child's play.

CHAPTER XI.

LADY HARTRINGTON'S DINNER-PARTY.

"KATE, could I not get off going to this dinner-party? I would so much rather stay at home."

The speaker was Mrs. Freeth, who, with her family, had returned to town a few days previously.

"I do not see how, dear mamma, you could. People do not like to be disappointed of a dinner-guest at the last moment, when there is no time to fill up the vacant place."

"Oh, at a large party," returned the mother, "at a large party of at least twenty, which, I dare say, this of Lady Hartrington's will be, it cannot signify; and you and your papa can easily make my apologies."

"But what shall we say?" replied Catherine.

"Say? Oh, say what is the truth,—that we have only just returned home from Shinglebeach, and that I am over-fatigued with unpacking, and arranging domestic matters."

"I am afraid," said Catherine, with a slight shake of her head, "that papa would be greatly vexed if such an apology were offered. What a pity that you did not decline the invitation at first, since you are so disinclined to go."

"Your papa would not let me, or I should have done so."

"Then I am sure papa must wish you to keep your engagement."

"Kate, I cannot help it, though, perhaps, I am wrong. I am sure my not wishing to go is from no fault of Lady

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Hartrington's; for she has always been very civil to us. But I don't feel at ease with her, as I do with old friends; and then everything is so magnificent; so beyond all we have been used to, that I feel quite stupid and depressed—"

"What a pity," sighed Catherine. "To me her house is quite exhilarating, and I cannot fancy how you can be afraid of her. She seems to me the most charming old lady in the world."

"Ah, well, you can talk about the things Lady Hartrington is interested in. I cannot. I declare, I feel today that if I forced myself to go, I should very likely burst out crying when I got there;" and Mrs. Freeth lifted her handkerchief, as if the very thought brought tears.

"Dear mamma, you must be ill," said Catherine, tenderly. "I hardly like to leave you."

"Oh, *you* must go," replied the mother, speaking eagerly; "it would vex your papa indeed, for us both to disappoint; and, besides, I am not to say ill,—only tired and worried about a hundred things. Ah, what a happy time it was at Shinglebeach, compared with this London life! Suppose you were to make the excuse that I am staying at home to receive the new governess. That is quite true, you know."

"It is not a reason that would please papa. Hester is too sensible to expect such consideration, I am sure, and will most likely be tired with her journey, and glad to be perfectly quiet. At any rate, Phœbe and Jane are quite old enough to welcome her. Indeed, mamma, it would be rude to send such a message to Lady Hartrington."

"Then what can I say," sighed Mrs. Freeth, "if I must not tell the truth? Though, indeed, I have a headache, if you think that sufficient apology."

"If you are resolved to stay at home, we must make it serve. But I wish, even now, that I could persuade you to exert yourself and go. Only, it is high time to dress. Burton is quicker than your maid; she would put out

your things in no time, and dress you without trouble, and I could manage very well with Janet's assistance."

"No, no, I cannot go; but if I did, I should not want Burton. I am content with a humbler person, who does a great deal more useful work. And, I must say, Catherine," added Mrs. Freeth, with a just perceptible asperity, "I must say that you are getting into dreadfully idle, helpless habits, having Burton always at your beck and call; though, as for her hair-dressing, your hair never looked so well as when you did it yourself."

"You know papa wished us to have a proper lady's maid," exclaimed Catherine in self-defence, "and really, one servant between three sisters is not more than is necessary."

"Necessary!" replied Mrs. Freeth, with decided emphasis. "My dear, ask Janet Gillespie how she managed with all of you, and nothing but a servant of all work besides."

"Mamma, things were very different then," said Catherine meekly; "and, indeed, indeed I am not idle; though I do like plenty of servants about me, and I think the great comfort of having money is that one need not waste one's time in doing any menial thing for one's self."

"Ah, well, it is no use arguing," sighed Mrs. Freeth; but she added, "yet, I declare, Catherine, to hear you talk quite frightens me sometimes, and where you got your notions from I cannot think!"

With fine tact, Catherine saw that she must no longer treat her mother's present mood in a serious manner, so she tried to laugh it off; and then, hoping the headache would soon be cured, and charging Mrs. Freeth with kind messages to Hester Otway, she ran upstairs to commence dressing. Before she reached her room, her father's step was heard, and she knew he must be gone into the little back drawing-room, where he would hear his wife's excuse for staying at home.

Perhaps it was well that Catherine had to dress rather



hurriedly, otherwise she might have mused more sorrowfully about her mother's indifference to so much that delighted herself. But, be it remembered, that Catherine was only eighteen, at the very age and with the very temperament to enjoy life keenly. Though an "engaged girl," and her lover absent, she had still looked forward to this dinner-party with interest and pleasure; for Sir Jasper and Lady Hartrington were exceptional people, who drew the most delightful society about them. She knew it was a party hurriedly made up in honor of a distinguished foreigner, and that Lady Hartrington had done her best to gather together at short notice, and "out of the season," people who would appreciate an introduction to the world-famous *savant*. She expected to meet several famous people, and was not without a sort of pride that it was her father's recognized talents which gave the *entrée* to this charmed circle.

Having an expeirenced maid, the dressing was expeditious; and as Catherine stood for a moment before the cheval-glass while she drew on her gloves, she could not but know she was fair. She knew, also, that her pale, yet rich silk dress, fell in graceful undulating folds; that it fitted perfectly, that the camelia in her hair, with its drooping leaves, lighted up the dark mass of her plaits and braids, and that the emerald cross—Reuben's gift—which rose and fell with her breathing, gleamed as only very precious jewels do. But this knowledge kindled not one spark of vulgar vanity in her mind; it only shed about her just that quiet satisfaction which is indispensable to womanly dignity. Nobody ever called Catherine proud or haughty, or vain or conceited; but if you had analyzed her gifts and graces, a large amount of "dignity" would certainly have been found among them. It was a dignity like that we associate with the tall, sceptre-like lily, when we dream that, though conscious of its loveliness, it has no vanity, but holds itself erect, as if in unconscious aspiring toward those

excelling sisters which bloom among the saints, and are wands in the hands of angels. It is the rose—the queen of the earthly garden—which bows her head, as if oppressed by the remembrance of her beauty, and always looks as if blushing at the praises lavished on her.

Catherine and her father met in the hall, and in two minutes were seated side by side in the brougham. She was delighted to find him in excellent spirits, and less annoyed than she had expected him to be at her mother's remaining at home.

"It is a pity, but I could not persuade her to rouse herself and come with us," he said, in answer to his daughter's remark on the subject.

Now the truth is, Hubert Freeth's persuasions had not been very persistent. He had wished her to accept the invitation in the first instance, and certainly to avail herself of it, because he thought it right and proper that she should do so, and was conscious of the atrocity of breaking a dinner engagement. But it is necessary to admit, in searching motives and accounting for demeanor, that Hubert Freeth had ceased to desire, as ardently as he had done a few months previously, that his wife should be always his companion in society. More than once she had done and said "foolish things," which made him bite his lip from sheer vexation, and the result of subsequent marital correction had not been satisfactory, however tenderly administered. It had had the effect of making her watchful, self-conscious, almost sullen in society, and this is a condition which must lead to *gaucherie* of many sorts.

On the other hand, he was proud of his eldest daughter, with a pride that was deeply rooted, and daily nourished by her presence. Yet, perhaps, even he prized her more for her grace of manner than for those noble qualities of which her manners were but the expression. Certain it was that he felt the most sure reliance that she was already courted and received in "good houses," for her own sake,

rather than because she was his daughter. And, I think, as she hung on his arm, entering Lady Hartrington's drawing-room, he was reconciled to the message of apology he had to deliver.

Lady Hartrington was sorry for the headache, and sorry also for the vacant place at the dinner-table, more especially since, within the hour, she had had another disappointment. Perhaps she was sorrier still when eight o'clock struck, and the last of the expected guests was still absent. However, the German baron, the lion of the party, was there, and already in animated conversation with Mr. Freeth; under the sheltering bombardment of their two sonorous voices, there was the sharp rifle-practice of small talk and smart repartee throughout the room, and Catherine heard Lady Hartrington say to her husband:

"I never knew Algernon Raybrooke unpunctual before, —something must have occurred; we had better ring for dinner to be served."

And Sir Jasper rang; but in a few minutes, the expected guest was announced; in fact, just in time for Lady Hartrington to say:

"Mr. Raybrooke, will you take Miss Freeth?"

Evidently, he was an intimate friend, for the host and hostess more usually called him Algernon; yet it so happened that several of the other guests were strangers to him. It was only common courtesy to pay attention to the lady he had escorted from the drawing-room, and next whom he was seated, as a matter of course.

Mrs. Freeth was right in saying there would be at least twenty guests, as there were, notwithstanding the disappointments which had somewhat disconcerted the arrangements of the hostess. Catherine and her companion, however, found themselves placed near the centre of a long and broad table. Her father, who was on the same side, sat next to Lady Hartrington, and *vis-à-vis* to the German baron. A plateau of silver and looking-glass supported

shallow vases of flowers, the glass reflecting them, as if it were a bright stream of water, but, according to the then fashion, the massive *epergne* in the centre acted like a screen at that part of the table. The room was pleasantly, but not glaringly, lighted; the well-trained servants were quick and yet quiet; the viands and wines were excellent and *recherchés;* yet was there nothing of vulgar ostentation to provoke remark, and drag down the thoughts to the subject of gastronomy.

The conversation between Mr. Freeth and the baron, begun in the drawing-room, was soon resumed across the dinner-table; but it did not diverge into lecturing, and keep other people silent. The party, as commonly happens, broke itself up into little knots, and, in more than one instance, into conversational duets.

"Were you hungry?" said Algernon Raybrooke to Catherine, after some commonplace remarks had been exchanged between them.

The question was so odd, that Catherine looked up with a smile, and their eyes met in a steady gaze.

"Yes, rather, but not very. Why do you ask?" and the smile almost melted into a laugh.

"Because I owe Lady Hartrington's guests an apology, if dinner was really kept waiting for me. But I had to travel thirty miles, by railway, this afternoon, and the train was delayed by a slight accident. Then, at the terminus, I undertook to assist a young lady—a fellow-passenger, in a little difficulty—and the two circumstances together threw me an hour out of my time."

"It seems to me," replied Catherine, "that your fault should be more than forgiven, since it is outweighed by a good deed."

"Not at all; there are daily actions which it is no merit to perform, but which it would be great demerit to neglect."

"Ah! I have often thought that."

"Have you? Then, perhaps," he continued, "you will agree with me that praise and censure are generally somewhat blindly meted out."

"That is because we cannot trace motives," observed Catherine.

"And because we do not attempt to measure the force of circumstances."

"It would be very easy, I think," said Catherine, "to err on the other side; if we were always measuring the force of circumstances, it would be difficult to establish clear notions about the right or wrong of anything."

"That is quite true," replied Algernon; "but I confess, I am very lenient to people who hover, as it were, for a long time between opposite opinions; more lenient still toward those who have the courage to change firmly-fixed opinions."

"You are a defender, then, of changeable people?" And Catherine was so conscious of several changes of opinion having taken place in her own mind lately, that there was a ring of gladness in her tone, and her exclamation sounded almost like a confession that she was one of the people liable to change. Now it matters very little on a dull day where the first rent in the clouds takes place—the rent from which the murkiness sweeps away, and through which the blue sky looks serene and beautiful—in like manner, it signifies very little indeed by what common-course discourse sympathetic people first find themselves mutually understood. It is a fact that these revelations do take place suddenly and simultaneously, and with the irresistible conviction of truth.

I cannot tell what Algernon Raybrooke and Catherine Freeth talked of during the two hours they sat side by side, though not of friends and acquaintances certainly; probably, the range was wide, high, and broad, as the blue sky looks when the clouds drop away like a tent that is struck. Indeed, they seemed lapped and wrapped in some

ethereal atmosphere that had mystic influences about it. Yet, withal, they felt a great calm. Algernon Raybrooke bore a fair share in the general conversation of the table, and his manner had not a particle of the vulgar fussiness of commonplace men when they are struck with a pretty face, and seek to play the agreeable. There was no flirtation, no *persiflage*; and when, at last, the ladies rose, nothing had indicated to lookers-on that Algernon Raybrooke had, within these two hours, recognized the woman who was to influence his life!

Catherine was the only "girl" of the party—which, indeed, included more gentlemen than ladies—and perhaps it was natural that she should suffer the married ladies to keep up the ball of conversation during the post-prandial half hour in the drawing-room. Moreover, she seemed attracted by some fine engravings scattered about a table in one corner of the room, and she seated herself near it to examine them. Lady Hartrington drew her attention to some of Retzsch's outlines, which were new to Catherine, who was, however, quick in recognizing their power and grandeur. Like all students of German, she had read "Faust;" but it is not a work that is milk for babes, or one that is often in the least appreciated by youthful readers. As yet, Catherine infinitely preferred Schiller to Gœthe. Yet these pictorial revelations of the wondrous drama recalled it to her mind, and impressed her very sensibly. She began to recognize the humanity of Faust, and the pure womanhood of Margaret, as they were here interpreted. She turned the leaves slowly, drinking in the poet's meaning, by the artist's help, in a manner she had not done unassisted. And then, when the other pictures had been examined, she came upon that mystical creation, the "Chess Players," in which humanity is matched against the Evil One, a soul being the stake.

Wonderfully impressive is this pencilled parable, especially in moods of trial and temptation, and of strong

human emotion. The virtues, taken piece by piece, the exultant countenance of the fiend, and the shadowy form of the sorrowing guardian angel, have a strange pathos, fit to wring the half-repentant heart. It was this picture which lay in Catherine's lap, as she leaned forward in her low chair, when the gentlemen returned to the drawing-room. She felt, rather than saw, that as Algernon Raybrooke passed the doorway, his eyes sought her; but she did not lift her head. Nor did he at first advance to the side of the room where she was seated. Coffee-cup in hand, he stood chatting for several minutes with their hostess.

Presently, however, he drew a light chair beside Catherine, and, seating himself in it, began talking of the engraving in her hand.

"Ah, we have all that game to play," he exclaimed; "yet I think that to man there is sometimes given a wingless and visible guardian angel."

A great paleness came over Catherine's face, but was rapidly succeeded by a suffusing blush. Yet she answered promptly, saying: "But there are evil angels as well as good; how are we to distinguish?"

"Not by reasoning, not by teaching, but by intuitive knowledge."

As he spoke, his heart leaped with a fulness of ecstasy, for he had seen the pallor, and noticed the blushes, and they were to him like heralds of joy.

And now other guests drew near the little table, and the conversation grew general. It was becoming that, in the presence of the German *savant*, the literature and art of his nation should be appreciatingly discussed, and very natural that an amateur pianist of refined taste should select Beethoven and Mendelssohn to interpret. It was Algernon who opened the piano, and asked for the "Wedding March;" but he stood behind Catherine's chair while it was played. Some other guests besought the player not to rise, and the lady passed to the opera of Fidelio. It

was while she was playing, with unaffected pathos, some variations on the Chorus of Prisoners, that Mr. Freeth's carriage was announced, and soon afterward the party broke up.

Algernon contrived his leave-taking so as to be in the hall, in readiness to hand Catherine into the brougham, and then he jumped into a hansom cab which was loitering near. A hansom cab rattled along the street two minutes after Catherine and her father had alighted at their own door.



CHAPTER XII.

AT THE MIDNIGHT HOUR.

IT was not what Londoners call late; nevertheless, the family at Telford House had all retired, except the man who opened the door, and Burton, who had insisted on sitting up for her young mistress.

"But I told you to go to bed," said Catherine, as the maid, candlestick in hand, met her on the stairs. "Indeed I can manage very well for myself. There, that will do," she continued, when they had reached her room, and Burton had laid aside Catherine's cloak, and removed two or three pins; "indeed that will do; I would rather not keep you up."

The words, the voice and manner were as kind as ever; but yet there was something in Catherine's tones which compelled prompt obedience; and Burton, after stirring the fire and replacing the guard, courtesied "good-night."

The room was brilliantly light, but more from the blazing fire than from the candles on the toilet; and as Catherine turned from dropping the night-bolt, she could not help seeing, for the second time that evening, her whole figure reflected in the cheval-glass. It seemed to her that an age had passed since she had glanced at herself before dinner, and yet, in reality, not five hours had elapsed.

She might be conscious that a breath of change had passed over her countenance; but her eyes drooped, and refused to examine anything. Only did she remark that the emerald cross shone with a sort of fierce lustre, and hurriedly, and with trembling fingers, she tried to unclasp the



chain by which it was suspended. In her agitation she did not easily find the snap, and when, at last, the jewel was removed, she dropped it hastily into a drawer—almost as if it burned her hand—instead of laying it in its case. It happened that the clasp of her warm cloak had pressed heavily on the cross, really hurting her, had she been in a mood sensitive to physical pain, and the ornament left on her skin, for some little time, a red tracery of its shape,—and this she saw as she stood at her toilet-table.

In a more leisurely manner she unfastened the bracelets from her arms, and mechanically placed them in their cases. The bracelets were recent gifts from her father. Then she stripped some rings from her fingers, still in the same automatic manner; but, from the habit of many months, one ring, a diamond, set transparently, was left for awhile undisturbed. Suddenly she became conscious of the flashing jewel, and tried to remove it; but the ring resisted all her efforts. Had she grown stouter? or was her hand fevered to-night, and swollen? She could not tell; she only knew that the more impatient her endeavor to draw off the ring, the more that endeavor failed. After awhile she plunged her hand into cold water, and renewed her efforts with a sort of desperation; but no artifice succeeded. The jewel, in the heavy setting which she could not break nor bend, seemed, to her excited fancy, to flash defiance at her, like some living snake-like thing which tightened with more and more constricted folds.

At last, as if with a spasm of anguish, she burst into tears, and drooped her face in her hands; and this, though Catherine was not by temperament a weeping woman. It is true, her eyes could moisten readily with enthusiastic sympathy at noble deeds or tales of heroism, but such tears are like dewdrops that sparkle in the sunshine which exhales them. When she wept from any personal emotion, it was because some deep fountain was broken up; and never yet, in her short life, had she wept as she was weeping now.



When the passionate fit was over, she felt relieved by it, —in the same way that we feel relieved when sharp pain is mitigated, and seems melted into sheer weariness and exhaustion. Amid her weeping, Catherine had plunged her hands in her hair, and the combs were loosened so that her long thick tresses fell upon her shoulders, and hung before her eyes. There seemed a sort of comfort to her in the shelter of this natural veil, and for awhile she let it rest in unheeded disarray.

Indeed, she never knew how long she sat silent and motionless. The dying fire crackled in the grate, and the candles had already sunk in their sockets, when she roused herself by an effort, and began gathering up her hair and preparing for rest. Through the venetian blinds she now perceived that it was moonlight; and, by that instinct which impels us in moments of anguish or desolation to appeal to nature, she lifted one of the blinds aside, and peered out from her dark room into the bright night. For the night was bright, though it was only a waning, gibbous moon that had climbed the sky, and was shedding a feeble, ghostly light through the frosty ether. But myriads of stars flecked the blue arch, and the silvery galaxy looked like a stairway of heaven. Yet this glory of the night, such as many a time had afforded her a rapture of delight, seemed now almost cruel in its chill, far-off glitter; the moon looked misshapen and sickly, as if weary of beaming upon a world of woe; and the twinkling stars seemed pitiless in their shining unrest.

Every one knows how deep the shadows are on such a night as that I am describing; thus, as Catherine's eyes drooped earthward from their star-gazing, she did not at first observe that there was a living creature in sight. But London gaslights throw their beams far and wide, and in a moment or two a figure shaped itself into the gloom; but a figure that remained motionless as a carved effigy. Against a piece of wall, on the other side of the road, a tall man was



leaning, with his arms folded across his chest, and his head slightly upturned, as if gazing at the very window from which Catherine looked.

A sort of fascination now came over her; a spell which made her still hold back the blind, and caused her pupils to expand, as if, by force of will, her vision must ascertain for fact that which her bounding heart told her was the truth. Yes, she was not mistaken; and positively a smile curled her lip at the thought of doubt, as if there were something richly ridiculous in the idea that, under any possible circumstances, she could blunder, where *that* identity was in question. Yes, it was Algernon Raybrooke, who had been watching while she had wept. True lover, she said, with the strange strong love—not yet twelve hours old—which had lifted them both up as if by the force of a whirlwind!

Gently, now, she let the blind fall back; a great calm came over her soul, and she sought her pillow feeling suddenly sensible of bodily fatigue. The truth was, the great strain, the great wrestle of conflicting principles closed when she recognized Algernon's presence. To her own soul she now asserted that to Reuben Appersley, she belonged no more; and though his ring touched her cheek, as at last she sank to slumber, it seemed no longer to sting her by its grasp. She thought she prayed—vaguely, incoherently, inarticulately she knew—for guidance, strength, and help to carry her forward across the broad gulf that she had already determined to pass.

It may be that unseen hosts look, with angelic pity, on every soul that thinks itself "determined" on any course of action, and with deeper compassion still on prayers so heavily laden with earthly desires that they cannot be carried heavenward!



CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEXT DAY.

THE breakfast hour next morning came burdened with several petty trials to Mrs. Freeth. This pattern housewife and methodical manager was ever intolerant of late rising or matutinal unpunctuality, and was half angry at Burton entering the parlor with a request for a cup of tea and slice of toast, which Miss Freeth would take in her room, instead of keeping the breakfast on the table. Nor was Catherine the only delinquent. Instead of being up at least as early as her pupils, and giving them the completest benefit of her society, Hester Otway, the governess, did not even present herself, when the breakfast-bell rang at half past eight, precisely. Indeed, the coffee was cool, and the tea diluted, before she entered the room, with no better excuse for her want of punctuality than that she had forgotten to wind up her watch, and had mistaken the striking of a clock.

Mr. Freeth, who was just finishing his meal, greeted her very kindly, and with that instinctive courtesy which might help to make her feel that she was respected. As he did so, he could not help silently remarking that either Hester Otway was ill, or that she was dreadfully fallen off since he last saw her, some two or three years ago. Mrs. Freeth also observed that Hester's cheeks were pale, and her eyes heavy, but with the mental comment that Miss Otway had reached the age when women look their best by candlelight. Certainly, after all the fatigues of a long journey, the gov-

erness had looked fresher, brighter, gayer, the preceding evening, as she seemed heartily to enjoy the "tea-dinner" prepared for her, than she did now. Moreover, she had but a slight appetite for breakfast, though she would not confess to illness.

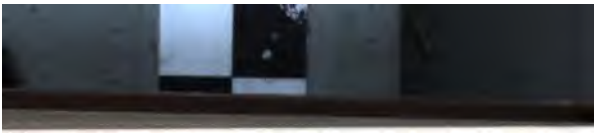
"I wonder," observed Mrs. Freeth, after a few commonplace remarks, "I wonder Catherine should be so lazy this morning. I thought she would be all eagerness to make amends for her absence last night, and to welcome her old acquaintance. For indeed, Miss Otway, she has looked forward to your coming to us with the greatest pleasure."

It would seem as if the governess tried to make some civil rejoinder, but that the words died on her tongue. Yet she smiled with a sickly smile, that showed the edges of her white teeth, but had no gladness in it, and then, as something seemed expected from her, she said:

"Miss Freeth is very good, I am sure; but it would have been a pity for her to have hurried down, or to have considered me as a visitor. Besides, she may be tired this morning."

The little speech was commonplace enough, yet it made Mrs. Freeth comprehend that Hester had accepted her position, and was not likely to presume upon past intimacy. Even the two young girls, Phœbe and Jane, looked up with a sort of shy surprise, thinking how much graver and colder their governess seemed this morning. Last night she had been cheerful and quite amusing, as she described some incidents of country life, till—as Jane now remembered—she had suddenly grown more silent, and begged to retire. It was just after their mother had told Miss Otway, as a piece of pleasant news, that Catherine was going to marry her Cousin Reuben.

Breakfast had long been finished when Catherine made her appearance, and really she looked so well, with her natural radiance so perceptibly heightened, that Mrs. Freeth could not refrain from uttering something like a scolding



for her late rising. But the scolding did not seem to hurt her very much this morning, and she only exclaimed:

"I am sorry, dear mamma, if you are vexed; I really have no excuse but idleness."

Meanwhile, she had approached Hester with outstretched hands; and offered for a loving kiss the cheek which was flushed, as everybody imagined, with pleasure at the meeting; a meeting, however, which she had been a little tardy in bringing about.

Suddenly, Hester was melted—even more than the occasion seemed to require—and, though her lips were cold and trembling, she returned Catherine's kiss with an impulsive fervor, and tears swam in her eyes as Catherine uttered some happy phrase of kindly greeting. Yet, glad as the two girls appeared to be at meeting, conversation somehow flagged, and nobody demurred when Hester proposed adjourning to the school-room with her pupils

"*Plus de richesses, plus de soins*," is a proverb that poor people are never very ready to believe in; but a good many mistresses, though not all, will declare that the more servants they command, the more domestic anxieties they endure. Certainly, Mrs. Freeth had grown to be of this opinion; and still found for herself, in verifying accounts and ordinary domestic affairs, very nearly as much occupation as of old. Thus it chanced that she and her eldest daughter did not meet again until luncheon-time.

Meanwhile, Catherine had the drawing-room all to herself, and by one of those artifices to which even frank-natured people, under a supreme temptation, have been known, half unconsciously, to resort, she unlocked her paint-box, and set her drawing materials in order before her; and had the household been required to give evidence of her occupation that morning, the footman would have declared that, when he entered the room to make up the fire, Miss Freeth was diligently painting.

But few indeed were the traces of the pencil the card-

board bore! It was her heart that, conscious of being stirred to its depths, was drawing out a chart, and coloring it in the brilliant hues which fancy is ever ready to lend to the youthful dreamer. And, as she leaned back in her chair, gazing on the inanimate pieces of furniture—which were magnetized through her eyes from her thoughts, and ever after retained a reminding principle of association—a panoramic procession of events passed before her.

To the vision of all true lovers, lions in the way lie down with the gentleness of lambs; mountains of difficulty take the proportions of mole-hills; yawning gulfs close up, or are bridged over by a miracle; rough roads are made smooth; hard things easy, and "difficult," as well as "impossible," is only a dictionary word made to be laughed at. Lifted into an empyrean, inaccessible to mortals in their ordinary condition, the soul has expanded to meet the requirements of the rarefied atmosphere in which it has now to breathe, and it scorns the lessons of the plain, and dreams there are no stumbling-blocks on the heights to which it has reached. And very often it is right; and the lions and the mountains and the yawning gulfs are by no means difficulties to be dreaded.

Thus, as Catherine leaned back, and yielded to the wave of her emotions, the fact of her engagement to her Cousin Reuben seemed not the strong and hideous fetter which it really was. Only one truth was there which, perhaps, she saw in its white clearness, untinted by the play of passions, —the truth that it would be a bitterer wrong to wed him under present circumstances, than to break with him in the rudest, roughest manner. But she would not break with him rudely or unkindly, but with the sweetest, tenderest, most sisterly affection. For, indeed, she loved him much as she would have loved him had he been her brother. Doubtless, he had made a mistake equal to her own, and she only wished that he would discover it at once by falling fathoms deep in love with some one else. Should they both live to



be old, how, perhaps, they would smile at the early folly which had mistaken a mere cousinly regard, the natural consequence of youthful association, for the heart's master-passion. Why, it was like mistaking a northern twilight for noon in the south!

Yet, even as she makes to herself the comparison, she remembers how soft and sweet a thing that northern twilight is, and how swiftly, in brighter lands, black night comes up and chases back the shining day. Suppose this firm assurance that she also is beloved should only be the figment of a dream! Why, still no matter; she must not marry Cousin Reuben, but let her life be constant to an idea, and satisfied with a memory. And, in the fervor of the moment, Catherine believed herself capable of calmly realizing this alternative; nay, even of finding in it something compensating and heroic. Yet, all the while, as if toning the picture of her possible fate, there reigned the sure conviction that at this very hour Algernon Raybrooke was likewise in reverie, and planning how, before the day was dead, they might meet again!

Luncheon-time,—which was dinner-time for the governess and younger children, and Mrs. Freeth *loquitur*.

"Catherine, papa thinks, as my headache is gone, I ought to call on Lady Hartrington today; would you like to go with me?"

"Dear mamma," replied Catherine, with an eagerness of manner that did not pass unnoticed, "I would much rather stay at home this afternoon than pay visits or shop. Besides, I have hardly spoken to Miss Otway yet, and she will be at leisure by and by."

"Oh, but I thought if you did not go, I might take Miss Otway and Phœbe and Jane as far as Kensington Gardens, and set them down to take a walk while I went further."

"Then for that very reason I will not go—that there may be room for them," replied Catherine, trying, however, to speak as if her decision, after all, were of little import-

ance. And yet she felt that she could not—that for worlds she would not—call that day at the house where she had met Algernon Raybrooke, and where nothing was more likely than that at the same hour he might himself be paying a visit of politeness. Whatever might or must happen, her girlish instinct taught her not to advance a step toward his presence.

The luncheon passed away rather more cheerfully than the breakfast-time had done. Though Hester Otway still looked pale, and had by no means recovered the good spirits of the preceding evening, there was nothing in her manner strongly to arrest the attention of her old acquaintances. Indeed, Mrs. Freeth attributed a certain gravity of mien, which was certainly perceptible in Hester, to her "governess" position, and, if the truth must be told, liked her all the better for it. The mother had latterly felt herself conscious of a keen sympathy with those unfortunate fowls who are set to hatch ducklings, and suffer the extreme possible of hen agony when they see their offspring take to the water. Mrs. Freeth was perpetually finding her children ready to do deeds and dare depths at which she shuddered, and, therefore, she contemplated with satisfaction a grave task mistress, who, no doubt, was both willing and able to maintain authority.

It was bright but chilly October weather, and Mrs. Freeth proposed that they should start between two and three o'clock, or the "beauty of the day" would be over before the pedestrians could reach the gardens. Accordingly, Hester and her pupils were ready when the brougham drove up, and, as it rattled away from the door, Catherine was once more left to her own meditations and resources. I think she was woman enough to smooth her hair, and see that the fair white collar, which encircled her throat, was without crease or blemish before she settled herself, with books and embroidery, to be "at home," and receive any chance visitors who might call that afternoon.

And of course that fine day there were a few callers, though it was the dead season, and nobody was supposed to be in London. And one visitor in Mrs. Freeth's absence merely left cards, and others were ushered into the daughter's presence, and they talked the usual morning visitor's talk, and by it distracted Catherine's mind, momentarily, from the idea which colored all her thoughts.

But when the last of these callers had departed, and the clock on the mantel-piece had chimed five o'clock, a death-like pallor stole over her countenance, and lines were marked there as by the touch of some cruel disappointment! Yet she leaned back in her chair, and, with tightly-clasped hands, but closed eyes, strove to recover her ebbing composure,—and not wholly without success. When again she looked at the dial, the twilight had so deepened, that she could scarcely distinguish the slender hands that pointed to the figures, and the next minute there was the sound of a carriage drawing to the door. Hardly had Catherine stirred the fire so as somewhat to illuminate the room, when her mother and sisters entered.

CHAPTER XIV.

NO ONE TO BLAME.

AS it has been hinted, the gravity of Hester Otway was pleasing to Mrs. Freeth; was considered by her appropriate to the "governess" character, and an earnest of those administrative qualities on which she was so ready to rely. And as Mrs. Freeth was thoroughly kind-hearted, as far as her sympathies were awakened, she did, in the drive from Westminster to Bayswater, make herself very agreeable. She showed consideration in several of the little arrangements she proposed, and set a very good example of due respect for the teacher to the two young girls, who sat *vis-à-vis*.

"I shall be able to take you up again in less than an hour," said Mrs. Freeth, as the brougham stopped at Queen's Gate; "and then we shall still have time to drive down Regent street, and do a little shopping before returning home. Or can I take you anywhere that you wish to go?"

"No, thank you," said Hester, "not today. There is no hurry about my little purchases; perhaps some time next week I may beg to be excused for a few hours, to see an old friend, and also arrange my winter wardrobe."

"Oh, whenever you like; you shall have the brougham any day, if you only mention your wish over night; pray—pray, my dear Miss Otway, make yourself quite at home, in all respects, with us." And Mrs. Freeth pressed Hester's hand kindly as she spoke, and the pressure was not only warmly returned, but Hester's eyes were moistened when she tried to give a smiling nod as the carriage drove off.



And then the governess—led by her pupils to the pleasantest paths—strove hard to find cheerful, wholesome conversation with which to beguile the time, Phœbe and Jane being nothing loath to bear their share in the discourse. For, though the girls were conscious of that undercurrent of gravity which had so satisfied their mother, their fresh instincts recognized in it a something sad, rather than stern, and their ready prattle and frequent questions were no way silenced by it.

But while their young voices rang with a sort of treble tone in Hester's ears, there was a sough in the autumn wind, as it whirled the dead leaves in showers from the trees, that seemed like a rich harmonious bass! Often in our lives there are noiseless events which mature character, even in a few hours,—and Hester Otway felt as if years older than she had been the day before. Older in the sense of having lived a real appreciable piece of her life in that short time. And, oh, the incredible value of those small kindnesses which cost so little, and yet are so often withheld! Those few kind words from Mrs. Freeth had been a strength and a solace to the poor dependent in an hour of unsuspected trial; and as the girls prattled, and the wind soughed, she lifted a prayer that she might see her duty, and do it, whatever else might betide.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Freeth proceeded to call on Lady Hartrington, whose residence was one of the few fine *old* houses in the Tyburnian district. Lady Hartrington was well—nay, what heralds would call high—born, seeing she claimed cousinship with half the peerage; and yet she was not what is understood by a woman of fashion. True it is she was nearly sixty years old, and so beyond the age which milliners seek for lay figures and living advertisements; nevertheless, so subtle an influence did she exert in a wide and ever-extending circle, that the tone of her drawing-room was felt to have weight in graver matters than the depth of a flounce or the shade of a ribbon.

Earlier in life her husband—now quite an old man—had filled various diplomatic positions, and so it had come to pass that she had dwelt in foreign capitals, and mixed freely with their denizens. Rather *petite* in person, there was not in voice or manner one masculine trait; yet was she a good linguist, a fine musician, a subtle art critic, and, what is a great deal rarer in a woman, a keen, shrewd politician.

The clever men who were the *habitués* of her *salon*—attracted thither at first they hardly knew how and why—had found out her gifts and graces only by degrees. The little gray-haired old lady, shrouded in rich cashmeres, or draped in velvet and the softest laces, had seemed, somehow, to develop into the beneficent godmother of fairy tales; so that, in the end, a sort of fabulous power was attributed to her, and especially the men, young enough to have been her sons, thought nothing improbable which she wished, and nothing impossible that she attempted to bring about.

In reality, her fairy gift was a shrewd, keen appreciation of individual character, allied to a deep and warm sympathy with baffled hopes and noble aspirations, with silent endurance, and all those earnest endeavors which make up so much of the unsung poetry of human life.

She was an old friend of Hubert Freeth's, and had been pleased in these latter days to become acquainted with his family. Catherine was already one of her "pets;" and in Lionel she was interested, looking upon him as a youth worth questioning and considering, and almost did she venture to prophesy his future, weighting her bright predictions with the fewest possible "ifs" and "buts." Though their mother was, in many respects, the very opposite of herself, yet she liked Mrs. Freeth a great deal better than she did many more brilliant women. She saw into the clear depths of her unselfish and sincere nature, and though Mrs. Freeth's experience and resources were evidently narrow

and bounded, there was something refreshing about her character when contrasted with the commoner types of sordid, restless people.

Lady Hartrington could not be wholly unconscious of the influence she possessed over many of her acquaintances, and it seems within probability that, in this the early stage of their intercourse, she desired, from pure good nature, by word and by deed, not only to set Mrs. Freeth at her ease, but to stamp her with consideration in the eyes of others, and confer all those nameless benefits which a beneficent queen of society so well knows how to lavish.

Therefore, when the door of her drawing-room—already tenanted by three other guests—was thrown open, and Mrs. Freeth was announced, Lady Hartrington advanced to greet her with more than ordinary cordiality. Then, leading her to a lounge-chair next her own—a chair just vacated by a gentleman who had enjoyed that post of honor—she made kind inquiries after her health, and lamented her absence the preceding day.

Now the small drawing-room, or morning-room, in which Lady Hartrington was accustomed to receive morning visitors was a spot very characteristic of herself. It was her habit, summer and winter, to occupy a fauteuil at the right-hand side of the fireplace. During the very few months, or even weeks, of an English summer, in which she considered it warm enough to dispense with a fire, the grate was always hidden by flowering inodorous plants; but this October day a bright fire, lately replenished with a log of wood, shone and crackled, and shed an air of cheerfulness throughout the room.

Books and pictures so nearly covered the walls, that it was hardly worth while to notice that the paper was of a minute pattern, in creamy white and gold. There was a looking-glass high above the chimney-piece, and a few little glimpses of mirror in other parts of the room; but not too much; not enough to dazzle with its glitter, or distort and

confuse objects. A noble bust, in marble, of Sir Jasper, taken in his prime, stood on a pedestal in a recess, and several exquisite statuettes, copies from the antique, were arranged on brackets. There was not an ornament in the room that looked as if it could have been spared, from the foot-high Arcadian shepherd and shepherdess, in old Dresden china—who seemed to keep guard over a quaintly decorated old clock—to the little chalcedony vases, that few but *virtuosi* discovered on a side-table.

The clock had been given to Sir Jasper, in acknowledgment of a signal service, by a French nobleman of the old *régime*, turned Bonapartist, and was declared to have belonged to Marie Antoinette. Nay, there was its pedigree, duly signed by hands long mouldering in the grave, and always kept behind the clock under the glass case. True it was that the works had often been "repaired" and "restored," and there were infidels who more than doubted if the metallic ring of its strike was precisely that which, to the hapless queen, had chimed away the days which led to a scaffold.

But Lady Hartrington always put her hands to her ears, and refused to listen to such suggestions. And the stern Old Time that stood at the foot of the clock, and lifted his scythe and turned his glass as each hour struck, seemed to say, "At least she gazed on me; and still I mow the generations down."

Indeed, there was an interest and a history about countless objects in the room; and as Lady Hartrington sat in her own special seat, with her little table beside her, she seemed fitly the presiding spirit of the place, who could talk as readily of the long-ago as of the busy, vivid yesterday. Always upon the little table was a vase of fresh flowers,—emblem, I think, of something perennial about their owner; nearly always was there a new book, with paper-knife between the leaves; a scent and salts-bottle; writing materials; and, whatever the season, a large Spanish fan.



The gentleman who had vacated the pleasant seat for Mrs. Freeth's accommodation was Algernon Raybrooke, who had caught the announcement of her name, and by a look claimed from Lady Hartrington the favor of an introduction. And yet, when this was granted, he did little to improve the acquaintance, but dangled his hat and gloves in a manner unusual to him, making essentially commonplace remarks, and leaving to Lady Hartrington the part of leading the conversation.

Once or twice he flushed like a girl, and had not the courage to utter the little speech which, somehow or other, must be made. "If her mother had not thus come in my way," thought he to himself, "I might have carried out my first intention, and called without invitation. But now I must ask permission. Well, I will see her downstairs, when she takes leave, and make my request at her carriage door. It is having betrayed my secret to Lady Hartrington, I suppose, which so confuses me." And then, after a little while, he moved across the room, and like an *habitué* of the house, as he was, entered into conversation with the other guests, leaving Lady Hartrington and Mrs. Freeth to enjoy a *sotto voce* chat. It was enough for him to have heard that Catherine was at home this afternoon; he did not even attempt double listening, always an unsatisfactory proceeding, to glean any shreds of the two ladies' discourse.

Mrs. Freeth did not strive to talk fluently of art, literature, or politics; but Lady Hartrington's friendly, unaffected manner, drew her into confidence, and encouraged her to speak without restraint of her family, and especially of her girls.

"Envy," said Lady Hartrington, with a smile, and falling into a tone of badinage not uncommon to her; "envy is, I am afraid, a quality deeply ingrained in the female heart. At any rate, I am afraid I always envy the mother of good and beautiful daughters,—except when the time comes that I have to pity her."

"How so?" asked Mrs. Freeth. "I don't quite understand."

"Oh, the position is so autocratic; her daughters' adorers are, of course, her slaves, and I think we women always use power so wisely, that every accession to our domestic authority is a palpable advantage to the community."

"But when is it that you pity us mothers?" answered Mrs. Freeth gayly, and wondering how she could ever have been afraid of a woman who chatted away thus merrily.

"I pity her," said Lady Hartrington—and now her tone was really earnest—"I pity her when the supreme inevitable hour arrives when some stranger, of only the other day, becomes, perhaps, quite suddenly the nearest and dearest, —not supplanting the love toward parents, it is true, but lighting up a warmer love nearer to the heart's core. I have always thought a mother must be superhuman not to feel some sting of jealousy when this time comes,—though, after all, she feels the pang, I believe, yet more acutely when a son falls deeply in love."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Freeth, after a moment's thought; "yes, I can fancy I shall confess to something of this jealousy when the time comes for my boys to marry; but I cannot say I have felt it with Kate's engagement. To be sure, her cousin was no 'stranger of the other day,' such as your ladyship suggests, and that may make a difference."

"Is Miss Freeth engaged?" asked Lady Hartrington, in a tone of surprise; and she added, "I am afraid you must have thought me flippant."

"Not at all, for there is much truth, Lady Hartrington, in what you say. But I thought Kate's engagement was generally known. However, our acquaintances must often forget these things, especially as Mr. Appersley is so seldom in town; and I can readily understand that the circumstance had not reached your ears."

"To a cousin, I think you said?"

"Yes, a son of Mr. Freeth's sister. The only drawback I can see to the marriage is the separation which will ensue. For Mr. Appersley is so much attached to country pursuits, that we shall never persuade him to be much in London."

"Of course, I must offer my congratulations," said Lady Hartrington; but, if truth must be told, in not quite a congratulatory tone. "Indeed, she has my best wishes; but we shall miss her sadly, she is such an ornament to society. I think I shall get up a little quarrel with this cousin, on my own account, whenever I have the opportunity, and reproach him for taking away such a belle. And I suppose the wedding will be soon?"

"Not till after Christmas," returned the mother.

"Well, we must make the most of your daughter while she is among us. But I suppose I have your authority—out of charity to the single men—to announce that she is engaged?"

"Oh, certainly; I should be quite sorry if any one who admired her fancied her free. But I don't think anything of the sort has happened,—she is not at all a flirt, and would never encourage attentions merely to gratify her vanity."

"I am certain of that," replied Lady Hartrington warmly; "still, men do sometimes indulge in vain hopes. And, in such cases, I always think it kindest to check them at once. I mean, when an engagement is positive and conclusive, as this appears to be."

"Oh, of course; it is the right thing to do in such a case."

And then the conversation glided to general topics, and the other guests joined in the discourse. Soon the two strangers departed, fresh visitors were announced, and then Mrs. Freeth rose to take leave.

As she placed her husband's card on the little table

already described, Algernon Raybrooke moved to the door in readiness to carry out his intention of seeing Mrs. Freeth to her carriage; but, as he did so, he caught the eye of their hostess, and read on her face a grave expression which startled him. The next instant, Lady Hartrington lightly touched his arm, and said, softly:

"No! Wait."

Bewildered—almost frightened—he knew not why, he instinctively obeyed, and sank into the chair he had vacated on Mrs. Freeth's entrance. But, impatient as a child who wants a puzzling riddle answered, he thought the fresh visitors who absorbed his old friend's attention inexpressibly tedious, and pined for their leave-taking in a manner which taxed his good breeding to conceal. At last, the happy moment arrived, and just as the October daylight perceptibly waned, and made the glowing embers shine out the more brightly by contrast, he found himself again *tête-à-tête* with Lady Hartrington, just as he had been at the commencement of his now so protracted visit.

"Dear Lady Hartrington," he exclaimed, "what malice is in your heart that forbade my going? Now it is too late to call, and how am I to live till tomorrow? And the poor flowers, which were to have been my excuse for a visit, will have to wither on my own table."

"Algernon," replied the lady—and she spoke with very tender gravity—"Algernon, my poor boy—she is engaged! Have I not done wisely to keep you away?"

The young man started, and clutched the arm of the chair, while a low, half-suppressed cry escaped him,—a cry almost like the moan of a creature suffering physical pain.

"Bear it like a man," continued Lady Hartrington, rising, and resting her hand on his shoulder with a motherly gesture; "bear it like the brave-hearted gentleman that you are."

"O God! I never thought of this," moaned Algernon, drooping his head between his hands.

"Hush! Yet surely it was a thing we might have conjectured."

"Might we? I think not."

"Why, Algernon, do you think it so little likely that others should have admired her?"

"No!" he cried, with something of bitter irony; "last night I felt she must have had admirers by the dozen; but the thought did not trouble me, for she bore not one of the signs of an affianced girl, or of a girl who had even cherished day-dreams of a lover. She had no right to look so calm of heart and fresh in feeling. Mad fool that I was! Yet it is madder of me now to take refuge in abusing her!" And, amid the conflict of contending feelings, Algernon burst into tears.

"Bear this trouble like a man," again pleaded his friend.

"Like a man! I feel it as a man, and therefore cannot bear it like anything else. But," added Raybrooke, after a moment's pause, "but pardon me, my kind friend, for thus distressing you. It was good and wise of you to tell me the truth without preamble."

"I know what most people would say by way of comfort and consolation."

"What would they say?"

"That this love, so lately and so quickly born, may surely be smothered as speedily."

"But, Lady Hartrington, you do not from your own heart say this?"

"How can I, when not three hours ago you told me you had met your destiny, and that she or no other must be your wife. Besides, I am not one to ridicule love at first sight. My heart aches for you, believe me."

"Three hours ago, I had no thought of the bitter alternative; but spoke it heedlessly, as the Fates make us prophecy, and then fulfil for us hereafter. My faith in her freedom was so strong, I would have sworn she was that

other half of my soul it had missed and yearned for. I had no misgivings,—not that I expected to win her at a word; but I thought that I should teach her to love me, and show her that we belonged to each other."

"At least there has been no fault; there is nothing with which you can reproach yourself. The meeting yesterday was a pure misfortune."

"No, not that," exclaimed Raybrooke; "not that. I would not be without the memory of last evening, even if I could. Those hours seem the reality of my life, and this revelation an ugly dream. But does she," he continued, "does she love this man to whom she is betrothed? And yet it is an insult to doubt it."

"Her cousin!" replied Lady Hartrington. "He is her cousin, and doubtless the attachment has grown with their growth."

"Ah!" moaned Raybrooke, as the feeble flicker of that sudden hope died quite out, and the thick darkness of his disappointment gathered round his heart.

"Stay and dine with us today," said his kind old friend. "You must dine somewhere, and we are quite alone."

But Raybrooke shook his head, as he exclaimed:

"Dine! Must I dine somewhere? But not here, indeed; not here, my kindest friend. I will go; let me go now, and may God bless you for your sympathy!"

As he took leave, he raised Lady Hartrington's small thin hand to his lips, saying: "There is no friend like a woman at such a crisis."

The twilight had deepened in that curtained room too much for him to see that the tears were in her eyes.

I think Lady Hartrington would have given her Marie Antoinette clock—which just then struck five—aye, and her Dresden china into the bargain, for the last twenty-four hours to have been rolled back, if her fateful dinner-party of the preceding day could, by any expedient, have been prevented.

CHAPTER XV.

A SILENT WRESTLE.

ALGERNON RAYBROOKE stepped into the first cab he could find, and was driven rapidly to his bachelor lodgings in Bury street, St. James. He found his groom, whom he had ordered to be there at three o'clock, still waiting, though hardly thinking that Sultan, the beautiful chestnut, which his master had not seen for three months, would be required that day. "Of course not, —it was now much too late to ride;" and the man hurried back to the stables, wondering what could have made Mr. Raybrooke so changeable, and so sharp in his speech and manner.

Algernon ascended to his little drawing-room, with a step less light than usual; and the first thing that greeted him was the choice bouquet, which, even in chilly October, a golden coin had been able to command. It had arrived according to order. Not that he had intended to pass through London streets with such a tell-tale offering in his hand,—he would have sent it forward by a trusty messenger, and received it at the door of Telford House, making it the graceful apology for his call.

There it lay on a side-table, freshly beautiful, and pervading the small room with its delicate odor. He flung down his hat, and threw himself into an easy chair, but the sweet aroma still stole upon his senses, as if to intensify his recollections. Once he took up the flowers, intending to hurl them into the street; but they looked so innocent, looked so much as if they would indeed have

been a meet offering to *her*, that he spared them, as yet, and laid them down again with gentleness.

Then he withdrew to his chamber, and bathed his head with cold water, and freshened his toilet from the instinct of habit.

"Lady Hartrington said truly," thought he; "I must dine somewhere,—and, day after day, life must go on with all its old commonplace detail. Of course, I shall get over this sudden fever,—men always do, people say. 'Man's love is of his life a thing apart,'—that's Byron, I know. Yet somehow his loves mixed themselves up pretty considerably with his whole existence. And who was it that cried,

'What care I how fair she be
If she undervalue me?"

"Ah, but he did care, or he would not have sung so defiant a song. Yet how strange it is that I cannot wish to forget this girl; that I would not, if I could, wash away the memory of her, as I now wash the dust of the day from my hands. Oh, yes, I must dine somewhere. So I will be off to my club, where, at this time of the year, there is likely to be as pretty a solitude as my heart can desire."

So Algernon Raybrooke sauntered to Pall Mall, and sat down to the customary fish, flesh, and fowl of a club dinner, with what appetite is not related. Then he read the evening papers with great diligence, smoked two cigars instead of one, and tossed away the last number of *Punch*, pronouncing it the stupidest he had ever seen. Later in the evening he met an acquaintance, and, by mutual consent, they adjourned to one of the theatres, in time to witness the performance of a new farce, which had, on every previous representation, it was said, kept the audience in a roar. Algernon's companion indulged in hearty laughter, and it being evidently the proper thing to appreciate the piece and applaud a favorite actor, Raybrooke strove to

share in the prevailing merriment; but, in his heart, he thought the whole affair buffoonery, and wished himself out of the noise.

The next morning Algernon found that his landlady had taken compassion on the poor flowers, and placed them in water, to adorn his table. They were his *vis-à-vis* all breakfast-time; but when he had swallowed his coffee and crunched his toast, he took the bouquet from the vase, cut the string, and began, one by one, to throw the flowers on the back of the fire. All, as yet, retained their freshness, except the crimson and purple bells of the quickly-fading fuchsias; dead, dead as his own hopes were these, and he threw them the first on the funeral pyre. A pale rose dropped its perfumed leaves as he lifted it, but the bright geraniums were perfect in beauty when they were consigned to the flames; the heliotropes scarcely touched by decay; and exotics of wax-like texture pleaded, but in vain, that their beauty might stay execution. Only a few sprigs of mignonette remained, when a sudden relenting stayed his hand. From these he shook the drops of water, and, as the smoke wreathed and curled, making fantastic images among the brighter blossoms, he wiped the moisture from the humble little flowers, and placed them carefully at the bottom of his travelling writing-case. "I am off to Brighton this afternoon," he said to his landlady, an hour later, "and may not be in London again for a month."

Then he wrote a short letter to his brother, to await his arrival off Portsmouth, and afterward adjourned to his club to hear the latest morning news.

Surely, the differences of sex are never more broadly and specially marked than in seasons of mental disquietude and heart trouble! Woman—though, at last, she may have her triumph through the sheer force and courage of endurance—woman the thorough woman bows her head and folds her hands, and by every mute gesture and tearful entreaty "implores peace;" peace for her silent wrestle;

peace for the slow subduing of her first agony. But man, the thorough man, leaps up in spirit from a staggering blow, or wrests himself from a painful captivity. If he drags the broken chain at his heels, it may be that at every step he breaks off a link, or loosens a rivet, and finds, as is fit in the creature of action, an assuagement of grief in active scenes and energetic employment.

In proportion as a woman may have masculine attributes, she also will probably rouse herself to exertion as a distraction from sorrow; and in proportion as a man possesses womanly tenderness, and a feminine capacity for soul-suffering, will he need some interval in which to conquer by endurance. And as Algernon Raybrooke, we have already remarked, was not without the morsel of womanly clay in his composition, he, for awhile, alternated between hours of bitter endurance and the time spent in the gay society of surely the gayest town that ever dipped down to the sea.

Of course, he met friends and acquaintances by the dozen. The season was just beginning, and people who had professed to be out of health, or out of spirits, forgot the occasion of their coming to Brighton in the enjoyment of the town life they were leading. Even people "out at elbows" seemed to have arisen from that depressing condition; and these black sheep of society, so long as they remain free from the absolute brand of poverty, are not chased out of the pleasure-loving flock.

However, they were members of his own London "set" with whom Raybrooke chiefly dined and chatted, or walked and rode. Also, he played billiards frequently, and improved in dexterity thereby. He wrote to Lady Hartrington, from Brighton, once or twice, but of course he had no other confidant of his sudden passion, and its sudden blighting. He struggled hard to be reconciled to his fate; and, as no honest struggle of such a sort is ever wholly unavailing, his active mind obtained some measure of



victory. At the end of a fortnight he was able to take up the dropped thread of his readings on political economy with sufficiently studious attention, and rekindle the fire of his ambition, which he now desired should draw all other embers of dead hopes into its flame. And even at this holiday season, and to pleasure-devoted Brighton, did business follow at the heels of the young M.P. He found himself entangled in correspondence with his constituents concerning certain of their local affairs, which they looked at through the magnifying lens of their own interests. But to him these railway wrongs and canal controversies were somewhat microscopic, and by no means constituted the themes he desired to discuss with British senators.

After a storm at sea the waters may seem lulled, while yet there is a ground-swell to perplex the voyager, and tax to the uttermost a pilot's skill. In like manner, consequent on great mental disturbance, the heart, the mind, the temper, have their ground-swell, long after the storm seems to have blown over; and it is just at these times that poor human nature so often finds vicarious, instead of legitimate, objects on which to vent its displeasure. Algernon Raybrooke was too much of a gentleman to be rude or even uncourteous to the worthy burghers whose interests he represented; but in his present mood he could not see their needs as they saw them, and did not show himself quite ready to place himself at their desired point of view.

Letters grew more instead of less ceremonious between them. And when the correspondence dropped, half Fordinghill had decided that their new "Liberal" member was a "darned sight" prouder and a precious deal less obliging than their old Tory champion, whom he had displaced. In short, the electors were in a humor to nurse and cherish their wrath, keeping it warm for future service; and when some of his defenders pleaded his youth and inexperience, the objectors growled out in reply: "Ah, served us just right for bringing in such a boy!"

CHAPTER XVI.

AN OLD SCANDAL REVIVED.

IN the buried past of twenty years since, a seed had been sown which had germinated, and was now showing forth its sickly blossoms setting into bitter fruit.

A lawless deed and a desperate criminal act—in part unknown to man, in part the story garbled and distorted till foul looked fair, and a victim seemed a culprit—had turned Mrs. Appersley's heart in bitter hatred against Hester Otway. And wild with fear lest a young man's "liking" should grow to love, she had bent all the powers of a strong will, and a life-long influence over two young people, to bring about the engagement between Catherine Freeth and her Cousin Reuben. Since first she laid her plans, not once had she wavered; and content in wishes fulfilled, she had not asked herself if blessings ever descended in answer to the outcry of hatred or revenge.

Indeed, she thought herself a happy woman as she watched the mellowed autumn sunset from that same window where we saw her anxiously awaiting her son on a former memorable occasion. The sun tonight went down just between two of the famous old oaks, and its beams reddened the few leaves that still hung, like little fairy flags, from the otherwise bare branches. The equinoctial gales had done their work, and made the trees already look winterly; but the day had been bright and fine, and Reuben had taken his gun, intending to indulge in pheasant shooting. The report of his fowling-piece had warned her that he must be near home, and she opined that he could not

have had very much sport, seeing that he had not started early, having had several letters to write. She did not know that one letter had not been entrusted to the bag—always examined by herself—the posting of which letter had taken Reuben Appersley considerably out of his way.

However, the birds had not been shy; he had bagged both pheasants and partridges, though he came home but slenderly laden. The truth is, he had found himself within easy reach of a station, and had bethought him to send on his man with divers "braces" and "leashes," directed to Telford House, Westminster.

How handsome he looked, as, walking up the broad gravel path nearly facing the window, he gave his mother a smiling nod, perceiving her on the watch for his return! On him, at least, no visible shadow had yet fallen; but if the proud and well-contented mother could have had for that one evening the vision of a seer, surely she would have been appalled at the consequences of her eager self-will.

The young sportsman was ready for a hearty meal; and it was one of Mrs. Appersley's old-fashioned womanly delights to recognize in son or guests a good "country appetite." She heard him order the careful cleaning of his gun, and admired his sensible caution. Later in the evening, when the curtains were drawn, he leaned back in his chair, with the county newspaper in his hand, and read aloud, for his mother's amusement, the most interesting paragraphs; her knitting-needles moving with something like a rhythm to his voice; and assuredly she felt that she had the best son in the world,—a son whom she a little grudged as a husband even to her favorite Catherine, but whose wife would undoubtedly be the very luckiest and happiest woman in England.

Could she, I say, have looked into Catherine's heart at this moment, she would have reeled, I think, as from a death-blow. For it was the evening on which Catherine first met Algernon Raybrooke, and the betrothed girl was

at this moment seated by his side, feeling that his voice, his words, rent away a cloud that had hid from herself her own heart, and becoming momentarily more and more conscious that the mere presence of this stranger awakened in her nature new emotions.

But Mrs. Appersley was no seer, nor of the fine clay through which "coming events cast their shadows" on the soul. By dint of determination of character, and a position of some influence, she did frequently bring to pass that which she willed; and so, in an outer sense, was sometimes a prophet. But when very subtle influences came into play, or very finely-strung temperaments were deeply moved, she had less influence than a child has often exercised.

Suddenly Reuben faltered in the reading of some local gossip. What business had penny-a-liners to rake up family history, and, for the sake of a convenient *àpropos*, and the pungent winding up of a sentence, to probe old wounds afresh?

"Why do you stop?" said Mrs. Appersley, swinging round her knitting to begin a fresh row.

"Oh, it was not worth while to go on," replied Reuben, trying, quite unsuccessfully, to allay his mother's curiosity.

"Reuben, there is something you do not choose me to know. Give me the paper directly."

As Mrs. Appersley spoke, she laid down her knitting, and readjusted her spectacles; then stretched out her hand, as if expecting prompt obedience.

"No, mother, I'll not give you the paper till I've quite done with it," said Reuben, in a voice of great tenderness. "After all, it is a mere passing allusion to the circumstances of my poor father's death; and if I had had the least tact and presence of mind, I dare say you would never have seen it."

"What is it, Reuben? I insist upon knowing. Don't treat me like a child, I beg."

"It must be written by some confounded Radical," cried Reuben, evading a direct answer. "I have suspected for weeks past that the "Meadshire Chronicle" was changing its politics, and now I am sure of it. It is only because I am a Tory that they say such a thing. Oh! how I should like to horsewhip the whole set. But if you *will* see it, my dear mother, you must. There," continued Reuben, pointing to a paragraph, "only three or four lines, and no names mentioned, after all."

Mrs. Appersley changed color slightly as she read, and then said, with scornful anger:

"No names are mentioned, it is true; but every one in the county will know whom the writer means."

"Perhaps so," returned the son; "and yet I don't know. A new generation cares but little for old scandals. Mother," he continued, after a slight pause, "mother, I should never have pained you by reminding you of these things; but now that the subject has arisen, do tell me the exact circumstances. I was such a little child for years after my father's death, and really what you have sometimes stated to me seems to make but a vague and indistinct story. I think I ought to know the whole truth, from beginning to end."

"Your father had enemies, who told lies about him."

"Yes, so you have often said."

"Not that he was without faults. If he had followed my advice, he might have been a rich man, and perhaps alive now. He was a great deal too fond of horses, and lost a fortune by them."

"But how was it he made enemies?" asked Reuben, perceiving that his mother paused in her narrative.

"A great deal of enmity was born of mere envy," replied the widow, "for he was the handsomest man in the county; though a little spite, perhaps, was provoked by his warm temper and satirical tongue."

"I should be inclined to reverse the proportions of the

causes," said Reuben, with a smile; "it is a thoroughly bad heart that hates any one for his good gifts."

"There are plenty of what you would call bad hearts in the world. I call them only specimens of human nature."

"But, mother, tell me truly, and without scruple, what was the worst his enemies said of him?"

"In the first place, they hinted that he cheated on the turf by bribing jockeys to lose; and then, after his sudden death, when the inquest and all those dreadful proceedings were over, the most shocking story of all was circulated; but, Reuben, I am sorry you have asked me to talk of these things."

"Mother, I ought to know."

"Well, this was it. They got some London druggist to declare that he had sold certain drugs to a person answering to the description of your poor father. Drugs that would have caused just such a death as that which happened to the favorite the very day before my poor dear husband himself was taken off. Oh, Reuben, repeating these vile stories brings back the old trouble and the old indignation; you should not have asked me to rake up the past."

"Mother, my distress is greater than yours, inasmuch as I am grieving you, as well as sorrowing, that such things should have been; and yet I ought to know everything. I ought to be quite aware of all that ever was said, if only that I may at all times be prepared to defend my father's memory. But tell me what means that allusion to madness in the family, or else something worse."

"Must I tell you? Well, the greatest lie of all—if one lie can be greater than another—was a lie that got whispered about just before that wretch Otway decamped. Nobody could tell who first started the story, but it was insinuated that perhaps, after all, the Squire did not die of heart spasm, as was reported, nor of any 'natural death,' as the coroner's verdict declared, but poisoned himself to avoid disgrace."

"How dreadful an idea! Oh, mother, how much you must have suffered," exclaimed Reuben, with deep emotion, and rising to caress her tenderly.

"Suffered,—yes. Only I thought these falsehoods must fade out of memory."

"It is very cruel to revive such slanders," mused Reuben; "but why do you call Otway a wretch?"

"Because he was always leading your father into imprudences, and then, when he might have made some amends—when, by reiterating and reasserting the evidence which he had given at the inquest, he might have put down the slander—he chose to abscond; just to run away from his own contemptible difficulties."

"His evidence, mother. I don't quite understand."

"He was sleeping in the same hotel in which your father was found dying; and, as a medical man, was naturally called in. Consequently, his evidence was received at the inquest as proof that it was a sudden spasm of which your father died. People talk a great deal more of their hearts nowadays than they did then; but my opinion is, hearts were much the same twenty years ago as they are now, and I am sure such a run of ill luck as he had, losing thousands upon thousands year after year, was enough to give anybody palpitations. I am not fanciful nor fantastic, but I cannot tell what I should have felt, or how I should have behaved, if I had known all that was going on, and the risks he ran. It was bad enough to hear of the losses when they could not be kept from me. Oh, Reuben, the betting propensity is very like the drunkard's, and total abstinence is, in many cases, the only cure."

"Perhaps so. But as I never had the propensity, it cost me very little to promise you that I never would bet."

"I am glad that you had not your father's temptations; but you must not judge me harshly for extorting that promise. You say it cost you little to make; and it has given me great peace of mind."

"Thank you, mother, for saying so. I am afraid, after hearing this history, I shall hate that cup"—turning his head in the direction of the treasured glass-covered memento—"I am afraid it will always recall more painful memories than pleasant ones. What do you say to melting it into gew-gaws for my darling Kate? I want to make her a present."

"No, Reuben, certainly not," replied Mrs. Appersley, with grave decision; "to remove that cup from its stand, would be like shirking a reminder of your father's connection with the turf, and a tacit insult to his memory. As for giving Kate jewellery, I should think you could afford it very well; for, so far as I make out, you must have heaps of money at your banker's."

A faint smile passed over his countenance as she spoke the last words, but he only said: "Well, perhaps you are right; and of course it was not the money I wanted."

Mrs. Appersley had the common fault of self-willed people. She was deficient in the power of sympathy. She knew that she had been moved and agitated by this painful conversation, but she did not realize how keenly her son had felt the biting malice of the slanders she described to him. She was even slightly vexed with him for leading the conversation to such results; and though, finally, mother and son agreed that it was best not to take notice of the unkind newspaper paragraph, Mrs. Appersley went off to bed with a half fractious "good-night," and a less tender kiss than usual.

And then Reuben told the servants that they also might go to bed; that he would take care the doors were fastened, for he was going to smoke a cigar in the garden.

Tired as he had thought himself in the early part of the evening, he paced the garden paths, up and down, and round and round, for upward of an hour. Somehow, tonight there was more tumult in his life than he remembered ever before to have experienced. Some events in his

father's career, and, notably, the circumstances of his death, weighed upon Reuben's mind with unmitigated pain. Across the dark story there flitted the phantom of Hester Otway; and he wondered how so charming a girl—for that she certainly was—could have been born of so weak and mean a father; and then, when he resolutely determined to turn his mind into pleasanter channels, and think only of his blooming Kate and their approaching marriage, a letter from Lionel, which he had that day received and answered, would be present to his mind, with dim mysterious augury. He had admired and loved Lionel as already a dear younger brother, and that letter, generously as he had responded to it, had given him a surprise that was almost a shock.

Finally, however, the ruling passion obtained the mastery. Memory and hope, reality and fancy, fears and wishes, all merged into the one absorbing thought of Catherine, till her voice seemed sounding in his ears, her light touch resting on his arm, her sweet eyes looking up to his. And the trouble was lifted, and Reuben Appersley was happy in the dreams of love and youth, as they seemed to fill the chambers of his mind, and saturate his being.

Alas, alas! the same waning, gibbous moon that climbed the London sky was shining on Five Oaks, making the old trees look weird and spectre-like. The shadows lay dark in the shrubbery, and the light rested in patches on the lawn, and the red gleam of Reuben's cigar might have been seen fitfully, as he paced along, now in the shadow, now in moonlight. More than once did he rehearse from memory the last letter he had received from her he so worshipped, and which had seemed to him a perfection like herself.

At that very hour Catherine Freeth was striving wildly to remove his ring from her finger, and had already sundered her soul from the contract which bound them to each other!

CHAPTER XVII.

LETTERS.

CATHERINE FREETH was not like Edith Aylmer,—the sort of woman to "thin" in a day. In the affluence of her youth and magnificent health, a great struggle went on in her soul for many days, without showing that outward devastation which would have betrayed it. But battles may be fought in a few hours which are to change the fate of empires, and battles of the heart may be swift, yet murderous, and leave for their results mighty changes and lasting consequences.

Another day, and another, passed away in the aching monotony of routine employment and the sickness of "hope deferred." Algernon Raybrooke made no sign, and as the hours crept by, to the wretched enthralment of her betrothal was added a new misery. A sense of humiliation would make itself felt. A conviction gained upon her that she had yielded to a delusion, been cheated by an unworthy vanity that to Algernon Raybrooke she had only been the pleasant acquaintance of an evening, while to her he was a power that had turned the current of her life, revealing to her depths of her own nature unfathomed, unsuspected before.

Still, through all the misery, one conclusion—like a goal that somehow must be reached—never ceased to be clear,—she must break her engagement to her Cousin Reuben; she must never be his wife. With natural maidenly reserve she would keep sacred her heart's secret, and only admit, with shame and sorrow, that she did not love him as a hus-

band should be loved. This, then, was her persistent resolve; but to initiate the rupture herself, without friendly assistance or support, and without any apparent provocation, was a task that seemed the more painful the longer it was deferred.

Should she throw herself on her mother's sympathy, and beseech her to strike the blow and break her fetters? Ah, no; it would be cruel and useless thus to agonize her mother, whose own love had been the love of her life, and who never could comprehend or tolerate fickleness of the affections. Of course, she must apprise her parents, and that speedily, of her intention; but she would give them no burden to bear that she by any possibility could lift from them.

And meanwhile Catherine sat at meals with her family —owning to want of appetite, it is true—and joined in the ordinary domestic babble, without calling black white, or uttering sheer nonsense; and she seemed to read, and she did execute needle-work, and she even played Beethoven and Mendelssohn, when asked for a "little music," with more than average expression. She did all this just as thousands of women have done, and will do, with a paramount thought, an unknown, unsuspected trouble weighing down their soul.

But the third night she slept better; and waking physically refreshed, felt stronger and braver, and came down to breakfast resolved this day to write to Reuben, and to apprise her parents that she was cancelling her engagement. She nerved herself to look at her conduct in its ugliest aspect; and knew that she must bow her head, and meekly confess herself a "jilt."

To Catherine's surprise, her father's place was vacant. He had been summoned by telegraph, at a very early hour, to one of the Eastern counties, in consequence of an accident to engineering works with which he was connected, and was off, by special train, to the scene of the disaster.

Mrs. Freeth was in tears. This giving way of the great Fenfield dam, and flooding the foundations of the new viaduct, was a grave sorrow, imperilling Hubert Freeth's reputation, as well as threatening great loss of property to the firm. And Catherine found that her duty for today was to be prop and comforter to her mother.

Clearly, it was incumbent on her to hide her own especial trouble yet a little longer. Not this the moment to add another anxiety to that which was pressing on her parents so heavily. I do not say that she was wholly insensible to a momentary relief, such as we all feel when the performance of a painful duty is imperatively postponed.

Presently the morning letters were delivered, and Mrs. Freeth, still weeping for the Fenfield disaster, left her own for awhile unopened, and took little interest in some which her daughters received. Generally speaking, in that family, letters—always excepting those of Reuben to Catherine—were considered public property, and either read aloud, or passed round the table,—a plan often admired by the heads of families, but which, perhaps, is more specious than excellent. When once understood by correspondents, it crushes spontaneity, generous confidence, and every quality which renders the letter of a friend the best substitute for his presence. And this at the same time that it tempts even the most candid to be guilty of little subterfuges. There were two letters for Catherine that morning,—one from Reuben, and one from her brother Lionel. But in the latter there was carefully and unobtrusively enclosed a postscript, written on a separate half sheet of thin paper, and headed, "To Kate alone. Quite private."

Catherine did not love secrets and mysteries; nevertheless, she managed to slip the envelope, with postscript unremoved, into her pocket, before she read and commented on Lionel's chit-chat letter. Very soon, however, she withdrew to her own room, curious and anxious to

know what Lionel had to say. As for Reuben Appersley's letter, the reading it had been a great agony; for it seemed inexpressibly affectionate, and with a vein of refined tenderness throughout that pierced her with remorse.

Lionel's postscript was as follows:

DEAREST KATE,—I have a great secret, which I hasten to confide to you, lest you should hear it first from Reuben, which I should dislike to be the case. What a trump of a cousin he is! or brother, indeed, as I shall henceforth call him. Do not start when I tell you that three days ago I had the most urgent need of five hundred pounds! I did not want the money to pay bills extravagantly incurred,—so don't be frightened about me on that score; nor to pay gambling debts; nor to return borrowed money; nor did I want the money for any selfish pleasure—unless it is a selfish pleasure to do what every fibre of the mind declares must be done, to avoid feeling one's self a paltry cur forever. I wanted the money with a great and urgent need; but what that need was, I cannot tell even you, my darling sister. I could not ask my father, for he would have insisted on knowing the why and wherefore, and hearing the whole story, from A to Z; and, after all, the secret is more that of another person than mine. Moreover, I doubt if the governor has money to spare just now. So, under all the hidden circumstances, I wrote to Reuben, saying to him far less than I am telling you, and boldly asking him to lend me five hundred pounds for an indefinite period, though to be paid, I assure you, as soon as I can pay it. He answered me beautifully,—you shall see the letter some day; though, of course, I know it was Kate's brother he thought of, rather than 'Cousin Li.' I could feel that to be the case; in every word he wrote, his heart seemed so brimming with its adoration, that he could not help showing it. Fine fellow that he is, he sent me a check by return of post; and for fear his mother should ask questions, did not even let her know that he had heard from or was writing to me. Though I urged him to consider the affair strictly confidential, doubtless he will talk it over with you; indeed, I said something about you and he being one. Some day this mighty mystery may be explained; till then, pray love and trust me. Will

you, dear Kate, supplement my thanks to Reuben? I feel that I have only thanked him coldly and formally, as a man may. *Burn this.*"

As Catherine Freeth read these lines, a cold shudder passed through her frame,—just as in tropical climes a chill wind rushes by a minute before the windows of heaven open, and torrents of rain begin to fall. When she had finished, she glanced back at two or three of the sentences; "brimming with adoration," "supplement my thanks," had seemed to blind her as she read; and then she dropped her head on the cushion of her hands, and burst into a flood of tears.

Not yet had Victor Hugo written his prose poem,—his "Story of the Sea;" but I think somewhat as Catherine Freeth felt now did Gilliott feel when the "pieuvre," that monster of the deep—soft, yet strong; toothless, yet deadly—began twining its whip-like thongs about his limbs. Doubtless, she was over-sensitive; what thorough woman is not? Doubtless, she did not look forward through a long vista of years with calm and searching gaze, or trace a chain of consequences with logical precision, and finally perceive that the present knot was of the gordian order,—to be promptly and sharply dealt with. Women are not sword-bearers, and, perhaps to the detriment of their own peace—or power (?)—are a little too apt to sit down, and, with pathetic patience strive to unravel the hard knots that bind them, instead of hacking away with any blade, sharp or blunt, which comes to hand.

Never had Catherine wept such tears as these. Somebody talks of the "black hoof" of Care. Has Care also its sharp horns, on which to toss about its victim from one vain hope to another, only to make the final trampling more cruel? It was really the pure unselfishness of Catherine's nature, its impulsive generosity, which caused her intense suffering now. The personal endurance of sorrow seemed so much easier a thing than the act of inflicting it.

How could she shape her thoughts to speech, and how could her hand pen the words which should tell Reuben Appersley she did not love him, just at the time when he had given such a tangible proof of his love, and when her brother had appealed to her to repay?

"Oh, Lionel, Lionel," she murmured; "you know not what you have done!"

Then she read her brother's lines again, and saw within the envelope yet another morsel of paper, on which was written:

"I was nearly drowned last week, but you perceive I survive to tell the story. No harm done, not even a cold. A fine fellow saved me at the risk of his life. I shall bring him to see you at the next vacation; meanwhile, string his name—Cuthbert Rawlins—on the rosary of your ffiends. Tell my mother about it without frightening her, lest she should hear of it some other way."

Nearly drowned! Well, the news did not stir Catherine as much as might have been expected, though, at the moment, she wondered he did not give that piece of information, and with fuller details, in the letter itself, instead of separating it like the other confidential communication, with which, of course, it now became always associated. Then she asked herself who Cuthbert Rawlins could be; and a dim recollection came up of Lionel having before mentioned the name as that of a new Cambridge acquaintance,—a college "chum."

Again and again Catherine read over Reuben's manly and tender letter, in which Lionel was not even mentioned; and each time she felt the more keenly that the writer deserved from her good, and not evil. She must write to him by return of post, not only because he complained of her many days' silence, but because he sent some messages which required answers. And so, with aching heart, she sat down to her desk, humiliated in her own eyes, and wrote a right cousinly epistle, answering all the questions

with precision, and going deeply into the circumstances of the Fenfield disaster. As she still wrote "My dearest Reuben," and signed herself "affectionately," she persuaded herself that there was no difference in her style and manner, and that yet a little longer Reuben must be blind to the truth.

And when her letter was posted, she hated herself worse than before; and almost decided to correct it by a short, bold, blunt avowal: "I do not love you, Cousin Reuben; you are true, and I am false; you are good, and I am ungrateful; forget and despise me, but pity me a little."

Almost did she decide thus to write; but behold, her mother, still tearful and anxious—fretting that the telegram which was to relieve her fears had not arrived—full of vague dread and real sorrow. And Catherine had not the courage to bring down another avalanche.

Late at night the promised message arrived. But it was only half satisfactory, and told that Hubert Freeth would be absent from home for at least a week.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ACCIDENTAL DISCOVERY.

THE next day passed away more rapidly than the last had done, for Catherine set herself resolutely to comfort her mother, and the attempt forced her thoughts, at least fitfully, from the one channel which had engulfed them. True, the frequent, sudden return of her mind to its own especial grief was each time a new agony, something like that we experience on awakening from sleep in times of trouble; but the brave effort to think of others and forget herself brought its reward.

In the afternoon Mrs. Brindley and her daughter called. The newspapers not having just now any special political event, mysterious robbery, dreadful murder, or fatal shipwreck in hand, made much of the giving way of the Fenfield dam, and, by dint of sheer verbosity and a few strong expressions, their reports produced the effect of an exaggeration, without being absolutely false. Mrs. Brindley had read more than one account, and came prepared to offer friendly sympathy,—and extremely anxious to hear the truth.

"My dear soul!" she exclaimed, when she had listened to all Mrs. Freeth could tell her, "why did you not send for me yesterday? Though, indeed, it was the merest chance I was not here, not having seen you all the week."

"You are very kind," replied Mrs. Freeth, "and I am sure I should have sent for you, had there been anything to do; for I rely so much on your judgment. But this is a sort of thing in which we women can do nothing."

"Only," said Mrs. Brindley, almost interrupting her, "only it is highly desirable that mischievous reports should be checked. I dare say the truth is quite bad enough, without people being allowed to fancy that the viaduct never will be safe."

"I have a few lines from Hubert this morning, in which he says that, if he can only get certain work done before the high tides of tomorrow, all danger of further damage will be over, and that the engineers, knowing better than they did before the difficulties to be overcome, the repairs will, in reality, make the whole thing more secure than ever. But, of course, I am very anxious for the next post, and very anxious to know how Uncle Thomas feels about the thing. I had rather a curt message from him yesterday."

"I can imagine that the old man is dreadfully grieved. Well, if any one in the world can, as the saying is, 'do the impossible,' it is Mr. Freeth. Ah, young people do not know what great anxieties are; do they, Mrs. Freeth?"

And Mrs. Brindley, babbling on, without always expecting an answer to her questions, turned toward Catherine and Aline, as she spoke.

"I don't expect children to understand these things," said Mrs. Freeth, with a little warmth, "and it would be cruel to wish them to do so; but I believe Kate feels this catastrophe as much as I do. Indeed, she seemed stunned by it yesterday,—but Kate, my darling, don't cry; what have I said to bring tears? Why, just now you were cheering me up."

"I shall be better presently, mamma. There; it is all over." And, hating herself for a hypocrite, the very self-scorn seemed to dry up her tears.

Mrs. Brindley looked at Catherine intently, fairly puzzled at this depth of feeling and depth of grief at one of those worldly troubles which usually wound the young so slightly; while Aline slipped her little hand into that of

Catherine, with a half-timid and yet caressing pressure, full of love and sympathy,—sympathy with the sorrow that was apparent, without speculating on its cause.

"Of course there are exceptions to every rule," proceeded Mrs. Brindley, "and your dear Catherine is more matured in character than most young girls. But, I declare, I have been here half an hour, and have never yet inquired after Lionel."

"He is quite well, thank you," said Catherine. "I had a letter from him yesterday."

"But he was nearly drowned last week, boating," said Mrs. Freeth, to whom Catherine had communicated that information, not in the body of the letter, she supposed, lest, suddenly told, it should shock his mother.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Mrs. Brindley. "Well, for my part," she continued, "I wonder accidents are not more frequent at Cambridge. Young men are so careless, and their boats are such mere nutshells."

Now, all this time Aline's hand had remained clasped by Catherine; but, as Mrs. Freeth spoke, Catherine was conscious that the fingers within her grasp fluttered like the wings of an imprisoned bird. It was, probably, an involuntary movement, of which the young girl herself was unconscious. Often, we can bear pain the better for having something to clutch; for, to steady the hand is like guarding an outpost; and, certainly, the trembling hand is often a sign of a trembling heart. Catherine felt this truth intuitively, without reasoning about it; and that little flutter, quickly overcome, revealed to her a history. Gently she loosened her clasp; the hand was withdrawn, and Aline sat motionless as a statue, only for a few moments pale like one, and then her cheek flushed to a deeper pink than it usually wore.

Catherine understood it all,—Lionel's "domesticity" during the past winter, and the chess-playing at which she had smiled. Indeed, she wondered that many a little sign

she now interpreted had remained unnoticed; but sure as she felt that Lionel and Aline were dear to each other, so sure, also, was she that their love was as yet unspoken. Was it to wither and die in that chrysalis form, or burst from the shell of silence into free and fuller life? Her heart leaped toward Aline Brindley with an emotion, half sympathy, half compassion; for, at that moment, the shadows in her own soul stretched far and wide, and dimmed the lustre of all love to her own mind, and she thought, whatever came of this attachment, some trouble must be entangled with it.

But a secret so surprised was very sacred with her, and Aline never suspected that the kiss Catherine gave her at parting was meant as a sisterly one.

It was good for Catherine to have made this discovery, since it opened out a new interest in her life, and gave her food for thought and observation; and, by degrees, the dark shadows shrank back, and she began to think that, after all, this love might be one to run smooth. Aye, and to hope so too, for Catherine had one of those most rare and unselfish natures, which can bask in the reflected happiness of others, and rather dispense with sympathy itself, than purchase it at the price of another's sorrowful experience.

Surely, she argued to herself, the parents would raise no objection to the alliance, for Lionel could hardly find a more amiable and accomplished wife,—not wholly portionless, either; a circumstance, Catherine smiled to think, never without weight among the elders. While, on the other hand, clever Lionel, "called to the bar," with good expectations, and all the influence of his father's name, would, in due time, be a good match even in the eyes of a more ambitious mother than Mrs. Brindley seemed to be. This castle-building for others was another distraction of mind for Catherine, and did her good. Really, it would seem that she was learning to carry her secret burden of trouble

more and more steadily; and yet, when her thoughts, from time to time, swooped down upon it, her very soul cried out in agony, "How long, how long must it be borne, and through what pain and humiliation must I be released?"

Thinking over Catherine Freeth's history, I have often speculated what her fate might have been, if she had only been moderately selfish and self-willed. If, for instance, ignoring that Reuben Appersley had wooed her before the tide of her father's prosperity had risen; indulging in no sentimental shrinking from paining her parents in a time of trouble; and, declining to participate in Lionel's obligations, she had written to her cousin, clearly and decisively breaking off their engagement. There are so many cosey and comfortable quarters in this world, expressly appropriated to the selfish and self-willed, that I incline to think she would have dropped into one of them, duly garnished for her service. It was only to say, "I do not love you, Cousin Reuben; the reason why I *will* not tell;" to say it at once, without waiting for better opportunity,—without caring whom she grieved!

And, indeed, some moralists may say such conduct would have been altogether prudent and correct, though probably they would have delivered a long-delayed judgment, based upon the consequences of the conduct. There is sometimes a crisis in life, with turnings from it so dismal, that which ever is not taken is pretty sure to be looked back on, in the end, with feelings of lingering regret.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

IT was a November-like morning, though still but the last week of October; a chill and dingy stagnant fog shrouded the neighboring buildings, from which, here and there, glimmered a yellowish light, where the ready gas had been kindled in aid of the feeble daylight.

As a small misery of life that tries the temper and depresses the spirits, commend me to a candle light morning toilet, and an illuminated breakfast-table!

Though the blinds were pulled up to the top for the daylight to stare through if it could, some gas-burners helped to make the gloom visible at Telford House that cheerless morning. The family had just finished breakfast. Mrs. Freeth was searching in the "Times" for a further report from Fenfield, and the post was in without bringing letters of any importance. Perhaps Catherine had rather expected a letter from Five Oaks in reply to hers of two days ago; but if so, her cousin's silence must have been a relief. What did happen was the wholly unthought of and unexpected.

A hansom cab drove up swiftly to the door, and out of it sprang Reuben Appersley. True, he had not written, but he had travelled by the mail train, and after taking half a night's rest, with very little sleep, at the railway hotel, had come straight to Catherine's side, to ask a simple question or two.

The children uttered an exclamation of delight, as they saw from the window who it was that was at the door,—for

at this moment the fog was a little lighter, and permitted him to be recognized. Catherine did not speak, but, by an impulse or instinct, she glided from the room before the street door could be opened. Everybody thought she had gone out to welcome Reuben, though her mother a little wondered at her precipitance. But Catherine had not advanced toward the guest; she had retreated to the drawing-room, where the housemaid was just gathering up her dusters and brushes after lighting the fire, and Jane Freeth was opening the piano in readiness for her morning music-lesson.

"Jenny, dear," said Catherine, "please not now. Ask Miss Otway to hear you by and by. Go, to prevent her coming upstairs, there's a dear girl."

Jane looked at her sister, puzzled at the request, and sorry for it; but she was obedient, and closed the piano gently, leaving, however, a piece of music upon it.

"Kate, dear, are you not well?" said the affectionate girl, still lingering, and now noticing that Catherine was unusually grave.

"Oh, yes, I am well; as well as one can be in such weather; but I want to speak to Reuben,—don't you know he has come?"

"Oh, has he? I'll go directly and tell him you are here. I am so delighted; you did not expect him though, did you?"

"No, I did not expect him."

But Jane hardly waited for her sister's reply; it seemed to her so right and natural that the lovers should meet as soon as possible, and have a *tête-à-tête*, by all means. Half child, half woman as yet, her dreams of love and marriage were all of purity and deathless faith, lit by the rosy glow of young romance.

"How do you do, Jenny?" said Reuben, as he saw her on the staircase, and gave her a brotherly kiss. "Is Catherine in the drawing-room? Phœbe said she thought so."

"Yes, and all alone. I am going down to the school-room. Oh, Cousin Reuben, we have such a nice governess now!" And the young girl tripped gayly down the stairs, not meeting Miss Otway, as she had expected to do. Hester had been among those who, of necessity, first greeted the visitor. He had shaken hands with her hurriedly, uttered some friendly words of recognition, but their eyes had not fairly met, and just now the governess was stooping over the supplement of the "Times," as if she had found in it some subject of absorbing interest. However, little Jenny's request, that the music-lesson might be postponed, aroused her from her abstraction, and five minutes later Hester might have been seen in the school-room commencing with her pupils the duties of the day.

Mrs. Freeth had hurriedly informed Reuben of the last news from Fenfield, but was fully occupied with little Lucy the next minute, and rejoicing in the discovery of two additional dental arrivals more precious than pearls, and unannounced by pain or fretfulness. Decidedly, there was no one of the family just now idle enough to interrupt the interview in the drawing-room.

Catherine was standing in the middle of the room, leaning her hand on the back of a lounging chair, when Reuben Appersley entered. She had come to a sudden, unprepared determination to tell him at once that she had mistaken her feelings, and loved him only in the calm sisterly manner which their relationship warranted. But when she saw the grave, anxious expression of his kind face, her heart already almost failed her.

"Catherine, darling!" he exclaimed, as he advanced toward her with open arms, from which she did not shrink. "What is it all about,—what have I done to offend you?"

"Offend me? Nothing, Reuben, nothing. What do you mean? you have always been goodness itself to me."

"Then why that cold and ceremonious letter?" he replied, "every word of which was like a stab."

"I did not mean it to be cold and ceremonious, but—" and by this time great tears were rolling down Catherine's cheeks.

"But what?" whispered Reuben with a sad gravity.

No answer.

The question was repeated, while the lover tried to wipe away and kiss away the tears; but this Catherine feebly resisted.

"Reuben," she murmured, "I did not think my letter could so betray me, but the truth must be told,—Cousin Reuben, I love you dearly; dearly, as I love my own brothers and sisters, but not as you wish to be loved. Oh, forgive me! My fickleness, my caprice are without excuse; I am unworthy of you,—I am indeed."

Even while she spoke such words as these, she suffered her hand to remain in his clasp, nor did he attempt to drop it. Only, with the other hand he shaded his face to hide the spasm of distress which moved it.

"Oh, Catherine, this is bitter! Again I ask, what have I done?"

"Nothing,—absolutely nothing; you are good and true, worthy a wife true and noble as yourself." And now she had released her hand, and was once more trying with quiet energy to take off her diamond ring.

"Tell me, do the family know all this?"

"No, not a soul."

"Good."

"It was due to you, Reuben, to tell you the truth myself. Oh, if you knew how generous I think you—"

"Kate, has any other man been making love to you?"

"No, Reuben. I believe that I shall never marry."

"Never marry!" And Reuben burst into a shrill laugh. "I see," he continued, "you are striving to get off the poor ring,—let me try."

There was a strange pathetic silence of a minute or two, during which Reuben took the passive hand, and really

strove with gentle force to remove the ring. Then finding his efforts ineffectual, he suddenly lifted the hand to his lips, and kissed it all over, inside and out. The next minute he was on his knees before her, just as in happier days he had often placed himself, half in jest, half in seriousness.

"The ring will not come off!" he exclaimed with a sort of gladness, "and I will not give you up. This is only a young girl's fluttering fear. Not marry! The idea is absurd!"

"Why absurd? Many women lead single lives; by choice often."

"Ah, but not Catherines,—unless they have been wronged or disappointed. Oh, Kate," he continued, "I will make you so happy! Yet not so happy as you will make me. My heart is set upon you; all the treasure of my life is staked on this one venture. My mother too; it would break her heart for me to give you up."

"Poor aunt! But if she knew the truth, she would soon be reconciled."

"No; she would always dread my marrying some one she did not like,—not that I should ever marry at all, which would displease her just as much."

"Reuben, I was wrong to accept you in the first instance; but I did not know my own heart."

"It is my opinion that you do not know it now. Darling, let us look upon all these doubts and fears as a bad dream,—to be forgotten as soon as possible. I am so glad that your trouble—for it has been a trouble, has it not?—has not been known or suspected."

"I have been a coward. It requires courage to proclaim one's self a jilt. It is an ugly name, especially for the eldest sister of a family, to acquire; but that is what I am."

"What you were,—in the bad dream. And, as you say, dreadful for an eldest sister. I can see it all. Phœbe

and Jane's possible husbands,—every one of them whistled away at the sound; even little Lucy with a right to shake her chubby fist at you."

"Don't, Reuben, don't; I cannot bear it." And Catherine burst into a renewed passion of tears.

"Hush, hush! love; you will be heard; do not let people know!"

In truth, Catherine's sobs were heard; but only by Janet Gillespie, who was passing the drawing-room door. It might be that her foot lingered for a moment to make sure of a sound which infinitely distressed her, but the old nurse was too much of a "gentlewoman" to listen longer. Only, she went about her work that morning with a pale, careworn face, and was a little absent when addressed. She alone of all the household had observed a change in Catherine during the last few days; a something too vague to be spoken about; but which, nevertheless, had made her anxious. Nor is this to be wondered at. There is a Freemasonry among certain people, the initiation to which is a peculiar baptism of sorrow; and even as in Masonry there are apprentices and grand masters, so, in the school of the heart, degrees are taken by which the pupils can recognize one another.

Mrs. Freeth had been wooed and wed, and for twenty years had been wife and mother; had had a variety of petty cares, and had known a few grave anxieties, but, like many another happy woman, had never experienced a great heart and soul struggle,—a struggle where something dearer than life is at stake, and yet where duties are not clear. Now, Janet had passed through such a fiery ordeal, and knew the signs of its scorching; this was why she could read tokens of trouble, though the loving mother saw nothing amiss.

Catherine soon subdued the violence of her weeping; but the dull sorrow at her heart seemed aggravated rather than abated. Reuben's generosity intensified her own self-

scorn,—for indeed she was beginning to despise herself heartily. There are natures, here and there, capable of severity and harsh injustice to themselves; natures with a keen but only half-enlightened conscientiousness, and with that womanly spice of cowardice which is afraid of whole truths and unknown risks. Such natures may be brave, beyond all power of portrayal, to meet life's "sea of troubles," as, like a rising tide, it comes upon them, wave after wave; but at some eventful moment they lack the power of iron-will and rock-like firmness, and so consent to suffer much themselves rather than that others should suffer a little.

After all, it would be a queer sort of world, with more wrangling in it than ever, if women were mightily different from what they are. Surely,

"Sweet love were slain,"

if "iron-wills" and "rock-like firmness" were dealt out indiscriminately to both sexes!

I cannot tell how it was, but those light words about her sisters went deep into Catherine's heart. She had thought much of grieving her parents and disgracing herself—of setting an evil example, it may be—but she had not thought of injuring her young sisters; and here was another pang to her already morbid conscience. She was in so excited a state just now, that circumstances all got out of perspective with her. Above all, her brother's recent obligation to Reuben loomed in her mind beyond even its just proportion. The central truth that remained to her the least distorted was, that Reuben's love was deep and generous, and wholly blameless, and that for his faith, his benefits, she was returning black ingratitude. As this feeling grew exaggerated, that counterpoise of sentiment and duty which had impelled her to break her engagement warped and shrank, till the question resolved itself rather to one of self-sacrifice than anything else.

She broke the silence which had followed her burst of tears by exclaiming:

"Oh, Reuben, how good you have been to Lionel!"

"Good! Do you mean about that money? Not much, my darling, between brothers. But what a booby to tell you of it."

"It would have been very mean of him not to tell me."

"But, my Kate, it is better not to mention this little affair,—I need hardly tell you I never shall."

"I am sure of that. But I wonder what Lionel can have wanted with such a sum of money. Do not you?"

"Perhaps I should wonder a little, if my heart were not full of other thoughts."

By this time he had again taken Catherine's hand. Every jealous dread had been chased away by her literally true answer to his question about "another man," and he began to feel she was his own again,—with even, it may be, a new halo of perfection gathered round her. Too palpable a display of fondness would have been far more fatal to his affection than any temporary coldness on her part. So Reuben Appersley chose to consider this little scene as a mere April cloud bursting in a sudden shower, but leaving the heaven of their love bright as ever afterward.

He began chattering about Five Oaks, and doings in the neighborhood; gave an imaginary message from Floss, who was supposed still to bemoan Catherine's absence; described the glories of the autumn landscape with truth and force, and then glided on into talk of new furniture which Catherine must choose, and pictured future happy days with faith in the coming reality.

And Catherine—though more than once her lips parted to reply—had no longer courage to say "No!"

By and by, Reuben's heart seemed warmed by its own love and truth; and he hinted, a little mysteriously, at a trouble he had, which Catherine ought to learn, only not

now; there was not time, and the telling would stir him too much. But Catherine proffered sympathy, and this was so sweet, that he told the story of the paragraph in the "Meadshire Chronicle," with his mother's explanation of it, at once, little knowing that every sorrow of his just now would be another link of the chain that was binding his betrothed again to him.

And, just as the narrative was finished, Jenny opened the drawing-room door, timidly inquiring if now she might take her music lesson. If "yes," she would begin playing, and Miss Otway, hearing the piano, would come up presently.

"Have I hindered it, Jenny?" exclaimed Reuben; "but you and Miss Otway will forgive me, I am sure. Let me help you," he continued, moving toward the piano to open it. But the young girl was before him; in a minute she had seated herself at the instrument, and was unrolling the piece of music she had left in the room two hours ago.

"What are we going to hear?" asked Reuben, half playfully.

"I am learning a new fantasia on an old tune. I hope you will discover what it is."

So saying, Jane began a brilliant prelude, which soon passed into the melody of "Should Auld Acquaintance be Forgot." Rich harmonies gave, to a cultivated ear, new pathos to the theme; and, as the girl was a born musician, the performance was really thrilling.

"Darling Kate," whispered Reuben, as he seated himself again for a moment by her side, "name the day you will be my wife! Nay, I will not leave London till the time is fixed. Speak to me, Kate,—when shall it be?"

There was a pause; and then Catherine murmured: "*If* it is to be—I *will* fix the time. But, Reuben, let me go now. Let me go before Hester Otway comes in."

CHAPTER XX.

THE DAY IS FIXED.

AND now the die was cast. Reuben had pleaded again and again, and had won over Catherine's parents to espouse his cause, so that the wedding-day was fixed for the first week in January. He had prolonged his stay in London day after day, until Hubert Freeth returned from Fenfield, and then, with simple eloquence, had urged that the marriage should be no longer delayed.

It is true, there was a wordless floating idea among the elders that Catherine would fain have waited a little longer; but the wish, they thought, was a fantasy,—a caprice which it was best not to indulge. They were wrong, as we know, for Catherine sincerely meant what she said to Reuben, that if the marriage was to take place, she would at once fix the day. But there must have been something strange in her demeanor which was thus misinterpreted; for Reuben Appersley was far too loyal—and perhaps too proud—to breathe a word of what he considered a sacred confidence between them.

Reuben lingered a week or ten days in town, spending the greater part of every day by Catherine's side. Autumn though it was, and "out of the season," occupation was found for the country cousin, and a little unceremonious visiting took place. "Papa" was too busy to pay him much attention, but he was often ready with suggestions, and, among others, proposed that Mrs. Freeth should take him to Lady Hartrington's on one of her reception afternoons.

Catherine excused herself from being of the party, and, consequently, the whole affair was flat and stupid to Reuben. And, in truth, he was out of his element in Lady Hartrington's drawing-room, and felt in a world to which he did not belong. He, whose judgment was slow, and whose opinions were all weighed and winnowed, whose loves were strong and hatreds deeply rooted, had not ready the talk of the coteries. The critic's incisive speech, the artist's studio language, the politician's latest slang were to him nearly unintelligible babble, and almost bewildered him. Yet, observing that these people who claimed to be in the van of progress, and to belong to the elect of the "day after tomorrow" differed hugely among themselves, he took courage and escaped humiliation, content to be what he was, even though his opinions were those of the "day before yesterday."

Something of the feeling he had experienced he expressed at the dinner-table an hour or two afterward, only the usual family party being present.

"You are half right and half wrong, Reuben," said Mr. Freeth, "in thinking thus slightingly of the Sir Oracles. For my own part, I believe truth is more often flashed out in the warmth of contending opinions than evolved by the independent thinker. For this reason, some amount of intellectual society is a sheer necessity for brain-workers; I know I have often mastered a difficulty through the suggestions of an opponent's argument, and the obstacles foreseen by some one who called the difficult—impossible."

"It seems to me," replied Reuben, "that all the great truths of life were settled long ago."

"Yes," said Mr. Freeth; "though not the manner of looking at them. But every thoughtful mind has, I suspect, a not dissimilar experience. Men and women with hearts and brains are pretty sure, at some time of their lives, to be under the fascinations of novelty. They get entangled, so to speak, in a swarm of fire-flies. But

another morning dawns, and the fire-flies drop, and the sun shines just as it did before. Depend upon it, as we grow older we survive many a wrong impression, and grow more reverent to the past. So that the opinions of the 'day after tomorrow' will often be the same as those of the 'day before yesterday.'"

"Uncle," exclaimed Reuben, "I am delighted to find you growing such a good old Tory."

"No, no, not a Tory; but I confess to being rather more of a Conservative than formerly."

"Please, Hubert, dear, don't talk politics," said Mrs. Freeth.

"My love, I am not thinking of such a thing; my little speech was merely incidental. But how did you like your visit to Lady Hartrington?"

"Oh, she was as kind as ever, but so sorry Catherine was not with us. I think she was very pleased indeed that I introduced Reuben to her."

"Did she show you her autograph book?" asked Catherine, addressing Reuben.

"No," he replied; "is it curious,—should I have liked to see it?"

"Quite a treasure. She has Tennyson and the Brownings, and Wordsworth, and the Duke of Wellington, and Nelson's writing with his left hand."

Catherine observed that Reuben warmed at the mention of Wellington and Nelson as he exclaimed, "Saviors of their country, I should have liked to see their writing," while he was comparatively indifferent about the poets. A slight thing this indifference, and yet it fell with a chill upon her heart.

That drawing-room of Lady Hartrington's, with its buzz of tongues and clash of thoughts, its bright faces and varied forms, seemed to her fancy like a lost paradise, where happy spirits congregated, among whom, henceforth, she would have no part. I wonder how many a heart has

been wrecked by undisciplined hero-worship, and the eager desire to taste life, heedless of the bitter lees which lie beneath its brightest bubbles!

Reuben quitted London a happy man. The brief trouble which had brought him so suddenly to town had passed away, leaving only a memory on his mind more of tenderness toward Catherine than of personal pain. And his next visit was to be as bridegroom.

Meanwhile, the *trousseau* had to be provided, and those infinite details to be arranged inseparable from a wedding *comme il faut*. Of course, Mrs. Brindley was called to the council, and, indeed, Aline was asked to be one of the bridesmaids. But though Mrs. Brindley gave a good deal of shrewd, serviceable worldly advice, she and Catherine frequently differed in matters of taste. Mrs. Brindley liked novelty, and generally approved of the prevailing fashion. Catherine had an artist's eye for color and contrast, for form and congruity, and, of course, after all, it was her judgment which decided. It would be false to say Catherine did not take some amount of interest in selecting the beautiful fabrics her father's generosity placed at her disposal. She did, for that artist's eye for beauty will delight itself whenever there is the opportunity, and the woman who is indifferent about her dress—save temporarily and under circumstances of crushing misery—has something inharmonious in her nature. Besides, Catherine was making a brave fight to be happy, and schooling herself to magnify every morsel of pleasantness in her path.

I dare say she would have been judged by strong-minded women as a little frivolous, and misjudged—as so many people are—for showing decided tastes and a decided will about black and brown, and blue and green, and silk and satin, and Honiton lace and Brussels; but, on the other hand, these very misjudgers would, perhaps, have deemed her insipid or affected, had she appeared a shade too indifferent about her equipments. It was a good deal wiser of

Catherine Freeth to turn her thoughts resolutely into the milliner's region of ribbons and laces, and to magnify its importance to herself, than to let her thoughts drift into Lady Hartrington's drawing-room, and be caught in the currents that flowed thence!

In reality, Catherine was growing every day more reconciled to her lot, more calmly contented, more hopeful for the future, and if—! Well, if there were no charts ill drawn, no adverse winds, no skies obscured, no compass lost, no ill built ship, no storms to be dreaded, no shoals and rocks for the mariner to shun, surely his vessel would bound gayly over the waves, and ever come safely to port; but I do not think the steersman could claim any badge of distinction, or order of merit, as guerdon for his success.

The short winter days seemed all too brief for the shopping which had to be done, and in which Catherine appeared to take so deep an interest,—let alone the visits that had to be paid; and to add to the bustle and excitement of the time, there was to be a New Year's juvenile party at Telford House, to keep Teddy's birthday, with Christmas-tree and Twelfth-night characters, so that, at last, the younger children might have the delight of receiving and entertaining their own especial guests.

To a certain extent, Mrs. Freeth enjoyed the needful preparations. A children's party did not present itself to her mind under formidable aspects; it would afford her ample scope for thoughtful kindness, and the good management in which she delighted, and her shyness did not amount to fear of a child, be it prince or peasant. Possibly, if she had had a wider acquaintance with some of those terrible little people of modern times, who seem never to be, nor to have been children, her confidence in herself might have received a shock. As it was, she had an innocent pleasure in noticing Phœbe and Jane's girlish eagerness, and harmless pride in their promotion,—each feeling a new dignity as prospective youthful hostess. Perhaps Phœbe

tossed back her curls a little oftener than was necessary; but the rippling smile on little Jenny's face was equally typical of her satisfaction. Of course, these feelings were a little dashed by that amusing contempt for "mere children" which the girl in her early "teens" is sure to experience; but this young party was a sort of preparation for real grown up society, with all its anticipated privileges, and as such had its fascinations. As for Gilbert, content that it was going to be a "stunning" affair, he had no suggestions to offer. Teddy, in a manner the hero of the occasion, rested on the promise that he should sit up to supper, and even little Lucy, who now could toddle and chatter, was, at any rate, to see the Christmas-tree a-light.

Certainly, nobody guessed that the Fordinghill constituency and the Fenfield disaster could have anything to do with the children's party.



CHAPTER XXI.

THE CHILDREN'S PARTY.

THE long-expected second of January was come,—a cold dull day, with a keen east wind. But within-doors everything looked cheerful at Telford House. A bright fire blazed in nearly every room, and the Christmas decorations of evergreens and holly were abundant and tasteful; servants were busy going to and fro, making the needful preparations for the evening; and light feet pattered about as the young folks alternately helped, hindered, or admired. Even "papa" had given up his study for the occasion, and there the Christmas-tree was placed.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, and Catherine, in her dark merino morning dress, was making final adjustments of the tree, her sister Jane handing her the toys and nicknacks not yet suspended. The green pyramid tree, the many-colored candles and varied offerings, with a background of richly-filled book-shelves, and the two graceful girls, made a pretty picture; and so thought the two gentlemen who rather suddenly entered the room. These were Hubert Freeth and Algernon Raybrooke.

Algernon had been again "worried" by his constituents about their local affairs, and was now endeavoring to recover lost popularity by interesting himself in their behalf. He had been advised to apply to Mr. Freeth as the man, of all others, who could give him the necessary information concerning some hydraulic works about which certain corporate bodies were squabbling; and he thought, having met him at Lady Hartrington's was sufficient

apology for calling on him at his office on a matter of business.

Of course it was. And though Mr. Freeth only just remembered him as a "gentlemanlike young man who sat next Catherine," he was courteous and kind, and gave him considerable information and excellent advice. But some plans, which were necessary to simplify his statements, happened to be at home; and, as he was leaving the office early in honor of the children's gala, what more natural than to ask Mr. Raybrooke to come round and see them, the distance not being five minutes' walk?

"Catherine," exclaimed the father, as he entered, "you remember Mr. Raybrooke? We had the pleasure of meeting him at Lady Hartrington's in the autumn."

Catherine bowed, held out her hand, uttered some ordinary phrase of greeting; and though her heart had made a wild leap at the recognition of the visitor, she was sufficiently schooled not to betray emotion.

Algernon Raybrooke was only a little less surprised at the meeting. Perhaps he was aware that a sort of fascination he did not trouble himself to resist, had strengthened his inclination to consult Mr. Freeth, and he had gladly accompanied him to his home; but he had not dared to hope that he should see any of the ladies of the family today, whatever future opportunities might arise for so doing.

"I forgot that I had abdicated my right here for today," said Mr. Freeth, with a laugh, "but I think I can lay my hand on what I want in a moment. Yes, here are the Fenfield drawings," he continued, lifting down a portfolio from a high shelf. "I will move the table nearer the window; or shall we light the gas at once?"

"Oh, I can see perfectly well," replied Algernon; "but I fear I am a sad intruder. I believe I like play better than work. I am sure I would rather be assisting the young ladies than poring over engineering plans."

"They are the simplest things in the world," returned

Mr. Freeth, who was a man that, on the whole, liked work better than play, and took Algernon's speech for a mere young man's politeness. But Catherine was glad that the visitor was obliged to give his attention to the plans, and she hurried the last decorations of the tree, and slipped out of the room as soon as she could. A weight was at her heart,—a dark terror of unknown evil oppressed her. And, above all, a self-scorn that she who, in three days, was to be Reuben's wife, could be so moved by this man's presence. It was as if a buried corpse stirred in its grave.

Hester Otway had dined with the younger children at one o'clock, but the family dinner, in anticipation of the early party, was to be in half an hour, and Catherine determined to let the bell ring on, and not go downstairs till every one must have assembled—not till Raybrooke must have departed—so that there should not even be a chance of encounter on the stairs. Alas! for such good intentions and their fulfilment. She found the family at table, as she expected, but, instead of the guest having departed, he had been asked to stay, so that some memoranda he wished to make might be taken after dinner. Even the seat he occupied was next the one reserved for Catherine. Could they help remembering how, once before, they had thus sat side by side?

The Freeths were all thoroughly unaffected, sociable people. Lionel had within this hour returned from a three days' visit to a college friend, and was in high spirits, prepared to make himself useful and agreeable. Moreover, he had previously announced that he had met Cuthbert Rawlins, and had invited him for the evening; he was such a capital fellow, and would make all sorts of fun for the children; but he thought his mother had better send him a note of invitation, which, accordingly, she had done. What, therefore, more natural than that another young man, thus fallen among them accidentally, should be asked to join the evening party?

From the depths of her heart Catherine hoped that Algernon would say "No,"—hoped there was really some imperative engagement he could not break. But the "No" was a very faint one; the engagement he had, only a promise to be at home to receive his brother,—an engagement at once superseded by the suggestion that he should bring the young midshipman with him. Decidedly, the party was taking proportions not expected in the morning.

Now, there is no sort of friendly gathering—not even a picnic—less apt to be formal and ceremonious than a juvenile Christmas party, with a fair sprinkling of "grown-up young people" amidst it. Where the elderly-young pretend to be children, and the children strive to be men and women; where the budding vanities are without malice, and fresh young faces wear no masks; where ringing laughter is clear as a wild bird's song, and mirth is not tangled with sorrow. Let the cynic be silent in such a scene, or whisper his forebodings, at any rate, with bated breath. We know the old, old story; the stern, sad truth. We know how these young hearts are already skirting the whirlpool of life; how soon they must be caught in its eddies, some to swim and some to sink, but all to wrestle and suffer. Yet none the less may we rejoice when clear young voices rise about us as if to purify the air, and strike a joyous key-note with their childish treble.

People feel influences without reasoning about them.

Between seven and eight o'clock the dancing began, the Twelfth-night characters having already been drawn, and a small cavalier of eight years old, and a little damsel of ten, been installed king and queen of the evening. Catherine had determined to chase thought by busy activity, and she flitted about the rooms, a presiding genius of the scene. She wore a simple white dress, with large long hanging sleeves, which, looped up at the shoulder with coral bands, sometimes shrouded and sometimes left bare her round white arms. Also, the masses of her dark hair

were sustained by pins of carved coral. The two younger girls, with their fluttering ribbons and crisply-curled hair, looked far more dressed and decorated.

Cuthbert Rawlins had arrived by eight o'clock, and was being caressed and fêted by all the family; for was he not Lionel's dear friend, and the gallant swimmer who had rescued him at the peril of his own life? Cuthbert Rawlins was good-looking and well-bred, with the ease and suavity of manner only acquired by contact with good society in the early and impressionable days of youth. Catherine had been asked by her brother to string the name of Cuthbert on the rosary of her friends, and she had tried to do so while he was yet unknown, and notwithstanding the painful association with which the request was connected. Yet now, when they met, a strange recoil and vague sense of disappointment came over her; while she was ashamed of herself for feeling an ungrateful, unreasonable dislike. Every one else considered him the life of the party. He made fun for the children, not boisterously, but with a subtle spice of comicality; sang "Le Postilion" with the genuine "crack" which delighted the little people; was ready to dance with the smallest personage in the room; but finally attached himself to Phœbe as her devoted swain, she being sixteen, he not quite one-and-twenty.

Algernon Raybrooke also arrived in good time, with his brother the midshipman, who came in uniform, and was a fine specimen of the young naval officer. And these were the only "grown up" gentlemen of the party. Mr. Freeth looked into the rooms three or four times during the course of the evening, spoke to the children he knew; but the whole thing was out of his line, and he found out some quiet corner of the house, where he occupied an hour or two in writing letters.

Mrs. Freeth was on hospitable cares intent, and full of small anxieties about the youthful guests, who all appeared

to her motherly conscience to be under her special care and protection. There was excellent opportunity for *têtes-à-têtes*, in a crowd, if such were desired. Algernon Raybrooke, to his surprise, discovered that Hester Otway was the young lady whom he had helped to recover her lost luggage, and they met almost like old acquaintances. Yet he thought she looked strangely older and more careworn, with a look of silent suffering which he had not observed before, and he speculated, for half a minute, on the trials and troubles of the governess's lot. He had gathered from some accident what was her position, and perhaps it made him the more deferential. He was standing chatting with Hester, when Gilbert came up, and insisted they must dance, as a couple was wanted for a quadrille.

Gilbert, to whom shyness was wholly unknown, and who had installed himself juvenile master of the ceremonies, afterward deigned to consult Algernon's taste, and begged he would select a partner for himself; but, before he arrived at this point of condescension, the boy, excited by the occasion, had chattered away freely and familiarly.

"Oh, it has been such a jolly Christmas!" he exclaimed; lots of parties and lots of fun; and I'll tell you something that perhaps you don't know. We are going to have a wedding on Saturday."

"A wedding!" replied Algernon, conscious that the word sounded like a knell, but master enough of himself to suppress all show of emotion. "A wedding! and pray which is the bride?"

"Why, Catherine, to be sure; the others are children."

"And the fortunate bridegroom," asked Algernon, glancing round the room; "which is he?"

"Oh, Reuben is not here; he will not be in town till tomorrow night. Would you like to dance with Catherine? She said she would not dance at all, but I dare say she'll give way if I ask her. Would you like her for a partner? We shall want you again, I am certain. Which

do you like best, the Lancers or the Schottische? Do say. I declare, you have not got a card of the dances. What a shame!"

"Oh, never mind the card," replied Raybrooke. "I shall be able to remember my engagements. And, indeed, I will accept your good offices with your sister, and shall be very glad if you can persuade her to alter her resolution."

"Oh, come along. There she is, in the other room."

Algernon followed the small master of the ceremonies, glad to be led by the boy's pertinacity.

"Now, Kate, I have brought you a partner," exclaimed Gilbert, "and you *must* stand up."

"I thought the grown-up ladies were not to dance, Gilbert," said Catherine, but meeting Algernon's glance even as she spoke.

"Oh, that is all nonsense, if you are wanted. Why, Miss Otway has danced; why should not you?"

"I am not sure that we are wanted this time," observed Algernon. "Perhaps Miss Freeth will allow me to chat with her while you dance."

"Very well, then," returned Gilbert; "but I must be off, for I am engaged for the five next dances."

The next minute the musicians struck up a lively quadrille, and Kate and Algernon became, as it were, imprisoned on one side of the room.

They talked; but it was not about dancing and music, or children's balls, or on any theme suggested by the frolic and gayety about them. Algernon spoke of their former meeting at Lady Hartrington's,—spoke as if he at least remembered all the small incidents of that evening; indeed, he might almost be said to resume the thread of conversation broken by the announcement of Mr. Freeth's carriage.

There was subtle flattery in this proof of his recollection, though Algernon Raybrooke never meant it for such. He

only gave himself up to the fascination and intoxication of the hour, not heeding whither it was leading him.

Catherine also was entranced. Oh, why did this man again cross her path, to make her discontented with the lot that to all the world seemed fair and bright? Or looking, speaking thus, why had he not come to claim her the very day after they had first met? It was too late now, for Catherine had learned who Raybrooke was,—how bright was his opening career, how fair were his prospects; and to her these truths were but new links to bind her to her cousin. Had Algernon been poor, and had said that night, "I love you, Catherine," she might still have been his.

And now the children were going downstairs to draw for prizes from the Christmas-tree. Algernon offered Catherine his arm. What could she do but take it? Soon the library was full of laughing, chattering children, and Mrs. Freeth, who dispensed the prizes, was too intent on her task to much regard the doings of the elder visitors. Children, from time to time, made their way to Catherine to show her their treasures, but even those already enriched lingered about the fascinating tree. Thus it came to pass that the drawing-rooms were nearly deserted. Frank Raybrooke and Jane Freeth had, however, returned thither, and Jane was at the piano, with the young midshipman by her side, when Algernon and Catherine reëntered the room.

Jane was playing, from memory, first one sprightly air and then another, as if at Frank's bidding; and, finally, the notes burst into a popular waltz tune, which she executed with no common dash and spirit. Half a dozen juvenile couples, yielding to the exhilaration of the music, were wheeling round the room. Cuthbert Rawlins had persuaded Phœbe to be his partner, and Lionel, who was a "beautiful waltzer," had drawn Hester Otway into the whirl. Was the music really inspiring, or the waltz-fever contagious? Without a word spoken, but with manner

more beseeching than any words, Algernon passed his arm round Catherine's waist, and in another minute they too were under the subtle fascination of the dance.

But the spell was quickly broken. Catherine was no prude; never before had she felt shame or wrong in the waltz, but some instinct of self-respect tonight cried loudly in her ear to desist, and hardly had they whirled twice round the room, when she paused, and insisted on sitting down. As she did so, she looked across the room, and met the earnest gaze of Janet Gillespie. The old nurse, with Burton and one or two other upper servants, was watching the youthful dancers from the doorway. In a minute they had to make way for the musicians, who were returning from taking refreshments; and, as there was to be more dancing before supper, Jane's playing ceased, and they resumed their duties.

For the remainder of the evening, Catherine busied herself to the utmost of her ability with the amusements of the children; but she made strange blunders, calling them by their wrong names, and by no means sustained the reputation her father had awarded her for ready tact and the skilful employment of resources.

Meanwhile, Algernon again found himself by Hester's side. Cautiously, and yet at last very boldly, he spoke of Catherine,—her beauty, her grace; and, *à propos* of the approaching marriage, asked questions about Reuben Appersley.

"Is he young?" inquired Raybrooke.

"Oh, yes," replied Hester; "only three or four and twenty."

"And handsome?"

"Very."

"A life-long attachment, I suppose?"

"I suppose so."

"Every way suitable, I imagine."

"Ye-es."

"Is the man worthy of such a girl?

"Oh, yes, yes; he is good and clever, and worthy of a noble woman for his wife."

Algernon looked at Hester as she spoke, and observed that her usual paleness had given way to a blush, which flashed to her forehead, and even tinted her throat. He read her secret, but without knowledge, without comprehension of details; therefore, it was wrapped in a haze of falsities. Yet he felt a strange pity, a real sympathy,—a something which made him feel there was a link ready forged between him and Hester Otway.



CHAPTER XXII.

AFTER THE PARTY.—THE WEDDING.

BY degrees, the children departed. Some tired and sleepy, fairly worn out with dancing, fun, and frolic; others with flushed cheeks and bright eyes, still wide awake with the wakefulness of excitement, which will show its revenge in languor and palor tomorrow. Truly, a children's party is a curious microcosm that a sage might profitably study.

Nor did the elder guests tarry late. It was hardly midnight when the family separated for rest. Catherine found her bedroom door ajar, and heard, before she reached it, a faint rustling of silk. Janet Gillespie was wearing, new on today, Mrs. Appersley's present, and looked very much the "gentlewoman" in the rich black silk dress. But it was no part of her duty to be in attendance, and Catherine almost rebuked her for sitting up so late.

"But I took upon myself to send Burton to bed," she replied; "and, oh, my dear, you must not grudge me the few opportunities that remain of my being with you."

A quiet kiss was Catherine's reply. And then the young girl seated herself in an easy chair, and lazily and mechanically unfastened her sash, and took the coral pins from her hair. Presently, she looked up, and met the earnest gaze of the old nurse, with just the same mournful and surprised expression which she had encountered an hour before.

"Janet, why do you look at me in that manner?"

exclaimed Catherine, in a tone of anger, so ill and so faintly assumed, that it did not deceive the poor woman for a moment.

"My darling, you are not happy!" she replied, and, as she spoke, she sank on her knees by Catherine's side, and wound her arms round her.

"Not happy! Why should I not be happy?" And now it was only a tone of surprise that was "ill and faintly assumed."

"Ah, why not?"

There was a pause, which Catherine broke by exclaiming, "Janet, what is it you mean? What have I done, what have I said, to give you these fancies?"

"You have done nothing, said nothing, my darling, and yet I know."

"Know what?"

"I know that you are unhappy." By this time they were both shedding quiet, noiseless tears; and Janet added, as she drew Catherine closer to her, folding her in the arms which had cradled her infancy, and speaking in a whisper, "Break off the marriage."

"No, Janet, no."

"I say, yes; there is time still; those papers, the settlements, are not signed yet."

"There is not time. I must meet my destiny."

"You are resolved?"

"Quite."

"My poor child!"

"Janet," continued Catherine, after awhile, but without raising her head from the nurse's shoulder, "how is it you have been able to look into my heart, and see the dreadful secret that is hidden there?"

"Because, in my own youth, I loved passionately, and suffered bitterly."

"And you do not despise me?"

"I only pity."

"But, Janet, you were happy in your marriage, happy in your love—"

"No; the daughter's disobedience recoiled on herself, and brought agonies of remorse. There is no happiness out of the narrow path of duty."

"It is my duty, surely, to marry Reuben; to keep my promise to one who is himself all truth."

"Not if you do not love him; not—I must say it—not if you prefer another."

"Oh, Janet, your words scorch me. I will not own even to you that this is truth."

"Own it now, and be saved. Or own it not—after next Saturday—not even to your own heart."

"That is what I have resolved. No other shall suffer."

"Hush, we cannot be sure of the limits to suffering; and resolves that rest on our own strength have brittle support. I remember hearing those words from my father's pulpit."

"I understand them, Janet, though I am not so good, so religious as you."

"There is none good, no, not one; and, oh, my child, stronger faith and truer peace may come to you even through tribulation."

"Stay; I am not yet ready to receive this sort of consolation."

"I will refrain," said Janet. "I know—none better—how sweet the world is, and how far off heaven seems to the young, the hopeful."

"Good-night, Janet. Do not grieve that you have spoken."

"Let me stay with you a little longer."

"No; it is well,—all that has been spoken. It would not be well to give to thought a fuller speech. Your present sympathy is the grain of medicine that does me good; a fuller measure would be poison. Again, good-night."

A little dressing-room communicated with Catherine's chamber, not used by her as such, but convenient as a receptacle for boxes and miscellaneous articles.

As Janet stepped on to the landing, she was conscious of a stir and flutter of garments near the door of the little room, and, no one having better right than herself to be there, she entered, candle in hand, to have her sudden fear dispelled or confirmed. What she beheld was Burton fumbling about a shelf, as if making a blind search for something or other.

"Oh, Mrs. Gillespie," whispered the woman, taking the initiate of speaking in a low voice. "Oh, Mrs. Gillespie, will you give me a light? My candle has gone out, and I have this minute come here, making sure there was a box of matches on this shelf."

Some people are always ready with a lie, coined neatly, like base metal from a royal mint; and Janet Gillespie had her own opinion about Hannah Burton's veracity and unveracity, and would have liked her explanation better had "this minute" been omitted.

"Yes, I will give you a light," replied Janet" speaking in the same low tone; "but let us be quiet, lest we disturb some one."

Alas! Janet was anxious not to "disturb" Catherine, and give her reason to suspect that Burton had listened at the middle door. The mere apprehension of the consequences of such a thing was a new trouble to the devoted old nurse.

As for Burton, she acted innocence and ignorance admirably; nevertheless, she was not the woman to be six months in a house without mastering the situation, without knowing the character of every lock, without appraising the density of every door, and the capabilities of their key-holes and crevices. She had been slightly piqued by being recommended to retire, and before she took the trouble of descending from her own room, she knew perfectly well

that that "middle door" had been hastily constructed, and had so warped that the ear could easily satisfy itself of all that was passing on the other side. There was but to remove the key, and the eye too had a certain limited range.

Burton was the type of a class not very numerous, it is to be hoped, but still so sufficiently distributed as to be recognized by experienced observers. In most respects she was the direct opposite of Janet Gillespie. Sprung from the very dregs of the people, Hannah Burton had no gentle memories to soften and refine her character; but the hard rind of her coarse nature had, in some sort, been smoothed over by circumstances, till, in outward bearing, she passed muster very creditably. It was her satisfactory appearance which had attracted Mrs. Brindley, who had engaged her in the days when Mrs. Freeth leaned on her friend for advice and assistance.

Picked out of a gutter, a keen-eyed, thin-lipped, elf-locked girl of ten or eleven years old, she had been taught and trained by philanthropists, and then sent out to service. Alas, that the teaching and training had not begun years earlier, when the human clay was softer to fashion! Shrewd and clever she was to learn all that could advance her present personal interests, and quick-witted enough to see that a certain amount of prudence and propriety would be her best stepping-stones in life. Without family ties or human affections, all her desires centred in herself; and from very early days she had a well-defined ambition to rise in the world; an ambition which would have been noble had it been allied to generous instead of sordid attributes. At first, a mere drudge to a mechanic's wife, it was a sort of rise to be the Cinderella to other servants in a large millinery establishment; but chance one day revealed that she was worthy of better things, had gifts of imitation, and could use her needle with a certain skill. She was promoted to the work-room,—a school for good and evil.

Henceforward, her way was comparatively clear; though she had filled half a dozen situations before we find her, at eight and twenty, a lady's maid, with a gold watch by her side, clothes enough in her boxes to last a dozen years, and with fifty pounds in the savings bank. Surely, from some points of view, she was a model domestic servant; one who could boast of her "character," and apprised her own acquirements very, very accurately! But, for all that, she was a thoroughly heartless woman, greedy of money, and of any sort of power that might lead to money-getting, as only those people can be who have not fineness enough of sense for any passion save that of avarice.

This was the woman who, long ago, jealous of Janet Gillespie's power in the household, and lately somewhat disappointed at seeing a young girl, whom she thought insufferable and inefficient, promoted to be Catherine's own maid at Five Oaks, instead of herself,—this was the woman who had listened at the warped door, and heard fateful words, only half understood, it is true, and who, through the key-hole, had seen the tears on Catherine's cheek. And the words and the tears were henceforth a memory and a power!

The next morning was clear and frosty, with the subdued light of a real January day. Up rose the wintry sun, scarcely high enough to be noticed above the London houses; but its beams were cheerful throughout the day, and rosy at its early setting. It was just the weather which the young and vigorous find exhilarating and delightful, but which chills and saddens the old and weary, and shakes roughly the sands in their glass.

By an early train arrived Reuben Appersley, looking radiant and joyous, without a shadow on his brow. His mother had declined the fatigue of a winter journey, and remained at Five Oaks, caring more about the due preparation for the reception, a fortnight hence, of her son's wife,

than to be actually present at his marriage. Though Hubert Freeth would have liked very much to see his sister on this occasion, nobody was greatly distressed at her decision; for Mrs. Appersley was a personage who awed and controlled people more than she endeared herself to them.

Then, by appointment, came the lawyer with marriage settlement parchments, to the reading of which the elder members of the family listened. Reuben's settlement on his wife was liberal in the extreme, exceeding by thousands the sum which had been talked of between him and her father. Hubert Freeth was touched at the surprise, and pressed Reuben's hand significantly. Catherine was not stupid,—she was more able to understand the plain meanings obscured under the verbose difficulties of lawyers' jargon than are three women out of four; nevertheless, she did not, at first, quite comprehend the state of the case, and that for her life she was to be mistress of seven or eight hundred a year. In fact, Reuben had settled nearly all his unentailed property upon her. When she did comprehend the truth, she knew she ought to be grateful,—and yet her gratitude oppressed her.

Later in the day—the day preceding their marriage, when the subject was glanced at between themselves—Catherine said, though with a tearful smile, "Am I thankless, Reuben, to wish this had not been? I should better have liked to be more dependent."

"Darling, darling," he replied, "I am right to have had my will in this; but thanks must never be spoken between us."

That night, when Catherine slipped her rings from her fingers, the diamond one came off with the rest. She had "thinned," though not in "a day!" Was it an omen she ought to have accepted? Not yet—not quite yet—was it too late to draw back, and remain unwedded. But no, Catherine Freeth's late resolve was not to be shaken; and noon the next day she had taken the irrevocable

vows which bound her till "death should them part," to her cousin, Reuben Appersley.

Not worth while is it to describe the wedding, or the customary pageant and ordained routine through which Catherine moved as one in a dream. The smiles and the tears; congratulations, formal or hearty; *déjeuner* speeches, pointed and prosy, were what we have all seen and heard on similar occasions. Reuben looked the "happy man" he was said to be, and Catherine a calm and dignified bride. One little incident piqued curiosity, and seemed to baffle conjecture. In the course of the morning a lovely bouquet of flowers, more rare than any which had been provided—colored flowers, from some choice conservatory—was left at the door for Mrs. Reuben Appersley, with the best wishes of a friend. Evidently, it was intended for the bride's travelling bouquet; but the messenger hurried away, only leaving the flowers to make their own sweetness acceptable.

When the time came for Reuben and his bride to start for the Isle of Wight, when eager hands were helping to wrap Catherine's ermine-lined cloak about her, and loving hearts were prepared for the farewell, some one reminded her of the choice bouquet; yet, nevertheless, it appeared to be forgotten at the last moment, and, amid the crowd and confusion of leave-taking, the beautiful flowers came into Burton's hands.

"Mrs. Gillespie," said the woman, looking Janet full in the face, "do you think I may keep these here flowers, as a sort of a keepsake from dear Miss—I mean Mrs. Reuben Appersley that is?"

"No doubt you may," replied Janet; "but you had better tell the young ladies that you have taken them; at any rate, I don't want them, I assure you."

Burton knew that perfectly well,—knew that Janet would not have touched them, except to throw them into a ditch; if to Burton the giver's name was blazoned on

every petal, how much more sure must Janet Gillespie be from whence they came? It rejoiced her heart that Catherine thus quietly rejected the offering, even though the flowers were cherished and dried and carefully preserved by Hannah Burton.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CUP OF COLD WATER.

SIX months have passed, and it is midsummer time instead of midwinter. Well we know that the gradual day-by-day changes through which the seasons revolve, work mightier wonders than earthquake or hurricane, and that the procession of the seasons has been for ages the type of human life; only that wintry age finds not on earth another spring.

The "day-by-day" changes through which sweet ties are strained or severed, and hearts fall apart, are often more gradual than the lengthening and shortening of our days, and the brightening and dulling of our sunshine; and to poor Mrs. Freeth the bright summer time was associated with a wintry loneliness of heart, as if prison walls of ice had slowly and silently grown up round about her.

Catherine's marriage had been a great break-up of the habit and routine of the mother's life, and this, too, at a period when the momentary chaos, which all great change occasions was only just settling into new forms of order. Mrs. Freeth was not what is considered a clever or intellectual woman, nor did she deserve to be thought a worldly-wise one; indeed, it may be that her husband would have admired in her some good share of shrewdness and tact, and might have fallen in love with her over again—if, as yet, he had fallen out of it—had she displayed just now unflagging spirits and untiring energies. Like the generality of men, he could do pretty well without sympathy, but not without cheerfulness in his surroundings; and, alas! his Bessie was

not half so cheerful and hopeful as she had been in the by-gone days of obscurity and narrow fortune. Her tearful anxiety and eager questioning at the time of the Fenfield trouble had positively bored and irritated him, and had had the effect of making him infinitely more reticent for the future about grave affairs.

Is it by some law of compensation in this world that every fulfilled wish brings with it a looming shadow of unforeseen care, and that troubles, in their removal, very often tear away entangled blessings, just as in plucking up a weed we may ruin a flower?

Another season of London gayety was drawing to a close, and poor Mrs. Freeth had experienced, in its full bitterness, the "loneliness of a crowd." Her younger daughters were too much absorbed in their studies, too full of eager undefined hopes and expectations, and every way too inexperienced in life to give their mother the sympathy she was mutely seeking. Mrs. Freeth liked Hester Otway, made a companion of her when possible, and fanned the flame of her own regard by a hundred little kindnesses, for which the governess was affectionately grateful. But the sweet strong tie which weaves itself about the heart in family relations—the tie of a common past—was wanting between them, and there were limits to their sympathy. Death had already begun to reap among the old friends of former years, and the two or three survivors of the band were separated from Mrs. Freeth by circumstances and distance.

If not to the "loveliest," yet to the "nearest thing" the human heart will too often be found to cling, and by very slow degrees Mrs. Freeth had grown to divest herself almost entirely of responsibility, and to rely upon Mrs. Brindley's judgment in every affair pertaining to household management, and the toils and pleasures of society. Telford House was a very pleasant second home to that lady. Catherine's former room was given up quite three weeks out of every four to Mrs. Brindley, and called her room,

while the dressing-room was fitted up for Aline, who, of course, could not be left at home. The arrangement was one which seemed to charm and delight all parties.

One morning, the elder ladies were sitting together looking over accounts, writing notes, filing receipts, and, in the intervals of meditation or composition, indulging in interjectional remarks of a domestic and confidential character.

The failure of Mrs. Freeth's sight had months since become sufficiently marked for her to have adopted spectacles; but this morning the glasses seemed more dim than usual, and several times she had wiped them with her handkerchief, but without visible improvement.

"Dear Mrs. Brindley," she exclaimed at last, "do look over this bill, and read it to me if you can. I always think that butchers' bills are made out in the most ridiculous writing and most puzzling manner in the world, but I cannot really follow this at all. The others are nearly unintelligible to me this week; but this is the worst of any."

"Oh, I shall make it out, I dare say. Pray give it me;" and, as she spoke, Mrs. Brindley stretched out her hand for the long narrow strip of bluish paper, which any one would have known for a butcher's bill,—say, by way of Gibbonian exactness, a mile off.

Mrs. Brindley read aloud the important document glibly, as she might the page of a book, and yet found momentary intervals in which she looked up and gazed for an instant on her friend, who was shading her eyes with her hand.

"My dear," she exclaimed, after the account had been pronounced quite correct, "my dear, I think you ought to change your spectacles for some of higher power."

"Do you indeed?" replied Mrs. Freeth. "Why, I had a new pair only six weeks ago, and the optician declared if I went on in that manner, giving way to the want of stronger magnifiers, I should take an old woman's glasses before I was fifty."

"My dear," continued Mrs. Brindley, after a slight pause, "if I were you, I would see an oculist; I think you must have tried your eyes very much in by-gone years, and perhaps they require some treatment besides the use of glasses."

"That is very much what Catherine said when she was in town, and if she had only stayed a little longer, I believe she would have insisted on my having advice,—that is, if she had quite realized how weak my eyes were. The fact is, I cried a good deal while she was here, and I thought it was that which made my sight fail."

"I believe weeping is very bad for the sight," said Mrs. Brindley sympathetically.

"I could not help it. In the first place, it was a terrible disappointment to me that Reuben and she shortened their visit to three days; and—and then I could not help feeling a sort of shock at seeing Catherine look so thin and ill."

"Certainly, Mrs. Reuben does not seem improved in health by her residence in Meadshire; she is thinner, no doubt. But perhaps she takes more exercise than she did in London."

"I don't know. I hardly call driving about in a phæton taking exercise; and she told me herself horse exercise, of which she used to be so fond, seemed now too much for her. However, we are thinking of going to Shinglebeach in August, and Reuben has promised to bring Catherine to meet us there, and stay a week or two at any rate."

"Shinglebeach, of all places in the world!" exclaimed Mrs. Brindley, in a tone of ironical astonishment; "and for the second time in your life. What on earth is the attraction that makes you choose such a retreat?"

"Don't you like it? Oh, we enjoyed it last year very much. There is such a beautiful open sea, and the country round about is very pretty."

"But it is such a dull place; you won't meet a soul you

know. It is the haunt only of nurse-maids and children. A friend of mine, who, by missing a train or steamboat, or something or another, was imprisoned there for half a day, declared he was almost lamed for life by knocking against those newly-invented machines—perambulators, I think they are called—they so crowded the thoroughfares."

"He must have been very careless, I think," replied Mrs. Freeth, with the utmost gravity; "not that I altogether approve of the perambulators. I would not put Lucy in one for the world. But I am sorry you despise poor little Shinglebeach. I am afraid, after what you have said, it would be a mere compliment to ask you and Aline to visit us there."

Mrs. Brindley bit her lip, but not outwardly. She did wonder that any one, with the world of sea-side places from which to choose, could deliberately select a quiet little "town," as it called itself; a town that consisted of three or four bunches of houses; an immature high street; a bathing establishment; a reading-room, and a chapel; a town where a crier regularly proclaimed the stirring events of the day—notifying that fresh fish had just been caught, or that a cameo brooch had been lost near the coast-guard station—a crier who could come within earshot of every inhabitant in half an hour. Nevertheless, she answered:

"Oh, for that matter, I should not be dull where you were, and I believe the air is very bracing."

"I am sure it is. We were all so well there last year, and so happy," and Mrs. Freeth sighed gently at the recollection. "Still, I would not ask you to come if you thought you should be moped; and, of course, my dear friend, you will make this house your home whenever it suits you, whether we are at home or not."

"You are very good."

"Not good at all; it would be a comfort to know that the servants were not left wholly to themselves,—that is, I mean to say," stammered Mrs. Freeth, who felt that her



additional over-frank remark had taken all grace from her proffered hospitality.

But Mrs. Brindley was not touchy, and she merely answered, "My dear, I quite understand."

At this moment luncheon was announced, but the ladies did not hurry to obey the summons to what is always an unceremonious meal. The children had already gone down stairs, and, with Hester Otway, had taken their seats at table. Mrs. Brindley preceded her hostess, and at the bottom of the stairs was met by Aline, who seemed to have been waiting for her mother. Nor was she the only occupant of the hall. Within these few minutes, an elderly woman, the bearer of a letter to Miss Otway, had been admitted, and was now seated on one of the hall chairs. At first she had only asked, very civilly, to be allowed to see Miss Otway; but suddenly, just as Aline had appeared on the stairs—Burton following her, to restore a handkerchief she had dropped, merely saying, "Miss Brindley, this is yours, I believe"—the strange woman had seemed to grow faint, and still clutching fast the letter for Hester, had sunk into the chair, as if from sudden fatigue.

"My good woman, what is the matter?" said Mrs. Freeth, with genuine kindliness, and approaching the stranger as she spoke.

"Nothing, madam, nothing that can be helped; only —only a bad spasm to which I am subject. But I beg for a glass of water, that is all;" and Aline, hearing the words, glided into the dining-room, and quickly returned with the pure sparkling draught.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Freeth had, in an undertone, suggested wine, but Mrs. Brindley, who lingered with her in the hall, had murmured that possibly the stranger was an imposter, and had meaningly shaken her head. It seemed hardly possible that the words, half-whispered, half-implied, could have reached the woman's understanding, and yet, at the moment, an expression of acute agony passed across her

countenance as she lifted her eyes and looked intently at Mrs. Brindley. It was a look of long-endured, yet freshly-aroused suffering, dashed with mute entreaty,—as if the last poor dregs of human hope were, for a moment, upheaved from the depths of the soul, yet only to be shown on the wave of despair. A look to haunt a painter, and defy his powers to render; a look that almost frightened Mrs. Freeth, and which she never forgot; a look that made Mrs. Brindley drop her eyes and change her opinion; a look that melted Aline almost to tears, and made her hand tremble as she gave the glass of water to the stranger. Was it by accident that their fingers touched for an instant, or was it that they would willingly have interlaced?

"Thank you, thank you, and may God requite you," said the woman, rising to put down the half-emptied glass; but who shall say if it was the "cup of cold water" for which she was thus emphatically grateful, or the tearful sympathy of the cup-bearer? It was singular—as obstinate facts often are—that Aline's countenance, transfigured by her pity, and the stranger's face, mobile in its suffering, flashed for a moment into likeness marked and strong. The resemblance faded out by degrees; and, after all, likeness is a sort of will-o'-the-wisp thing, that comes and goes; that is often totally absent in near relations, and yet crops out in the most unexpected quarters.

Meanwhile, Hester had received an intimation that she was wanted; but it being a standing rule that no one part of the family ever waited for others at the luncheon—which was likewise the children's dinner—she was busy carving a joint, and helping the young people.

"Say I am engaged, but will come presently," she had replied to the servant who brought the message. And thus it happened that there had been delay, and the stranger still grasped the letter she had to deliver.

Suddenly, the woman seemed to change her resolve, and, holding out the letter to Aline, she exclaimed, "Will

you, young lady, give this to Miss Otway,—give it with your own hands?"

"Indeed I will," replied Aline; "you may depend upon me."

"Depend upon you!" murmured the woman, as if to herself; and while the rustle of silk dresses proclaimed that the hostess and her friend had passed into the dining-room, Aline still lingered in the hall to hear the stranger's wishes.

"I will go now," sighed the woman—when Aline had taken the letter—moving toward the door.

"Will you not wait longer and rest?" exclaimed the young girl; "I am sure Mrs. Freeth would wish you to do so. Besides, perhaps the letter will require an answer."

"No, there will be no answer, and I must go. Only let me look at you once more. I knew a face something like yours, forty years ago. For the sake of that memory let me,—let me kiss your hand."

Aline, wonder-stricken, was herself passive; but as the woman pressed her lips to the hand, tears fell upon it; and Aline, touched, she scarcely knew why, was not altogether composed when she approached the luncheon-table, and laid a bulky letter near Hester's plate.

The superscription was in a strange hand; and yet the strangeness recalled something vaguely remembered, or once familiar; and as soon as Hester had finished carving, a natural feminine curiosity impelled her to unravel the mystery. "Excuse me," she said, as she broke the seal. It was a packet of bank-notes that fell into her lap as she drew from the envelope a half sheet of note paper, on which was written:

"For Hester Otway's sole use. The money is honestly earned, and duly hers. If she wearies of her present life, let her take comfort. With God's blessing, independence will be hers."

A slight ejaculation and a flushed cheek proclaimed that

the communication she had received was something more unexpected than a letter of friendly gossip, or a moderate milliner's bill. But only friends were present, and though, obviously, this was not exactly the moment to take them into her confidence, she admitted the letter was a great surprise, and that she would like to speak to Mrs. Freeth about it presently.

"Certainly," replied the lady; "but, dear Miss Otway, do not let the news take away your appetite; you are scarcely eating anything. I hope it is not bad news—"

"No, not bad news, certainly," said Hester, "though I am afraid it *has* taken away my appetite."

"Then you must dine again at seven o'clock, replied the hostess.

"Oh, you are very good; but indeed I shall not require another dinner."

"Yes, you will," pursued the lady; "we shall be quite alone, and my husband said yesterday that he had not seen you for a week,—and you know he always likes a chat with you."

Hester could not do other, after all, than smile, and assent to the proposal so pleasantly made.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TÊTE-À-TÊTE.

IT occurred to Mrs. Freeth that the news which could take away Hester's appetite might, perhaps, incapacitate her from giving afternoon lessons; so she was kind enough to propose a half-holiday, and draw the governess away to the little inner drawing-room, where she could receive her confidence.

To do Mrs. Brindley justice, it must be owned that she did not attempt to intrude, but said, as she passed upstairs to her room:

"I am going with Aline as far as Regent street, presently; can we do anything for you?"

"Thanks, no," replied the lady; "but won't you have the brougham? You may just as well."

"Are you quite sure you will not want it yourself?" said Mrs. Brindley.

"Quite sure; I am not going out at all today.

"Well, then, as you are so very kind."

And the hostess rang the drawing-room bell, and directed a servant to go round to the stables, and say that the brougham would be wanted in half an hour.

Meanwhile, Phœbe and Jane withdrew to the school-room; but not to school tasks, or turning the leaves of school-books. No; they quickly decided that their half holiday should be spent in the high revelry of novel reading. They could not find the first volume of the "last new book" which had come from the library—it happened to be lying on Mrs. Brindley's dressing-table—but they com-

forted themselves with the second and third; and as the book happened to be rather episodical, the two girls were soon absorbed in their occupation. Phœbe had seized the second volume, which seemed to be the next best thing to having the beginning, and soon found herself in the thick of the plot, and so interested in the elopement of a pair of lovers, that she forgot to toss back her curls. But Jenny rejoiced over quarrels made up, mistakes explained, foes reconciled, true love requited, and virtue magnificently rewarded,—all of which seemed as tuneful to her young heart as a peal of marriage-bells. Ah, we all dip into each other's lives, as these young girls did into their novel, and mostly the first volume is missing!

The half hour's tête-à-tête between Mrs. Freeth and Hester Otway was memorable to both of them, for it seemed to draw them affectionately nearer. Mrs. Freeth read the mysterious letter, and handled the crisp bank-notes—they were five tens and five twenties—but did not venture to give any positive opinion as to the propriety or impropriety of appropriating a gift so very strangely offered.

"But, dear Miss Otway," she said, "my husband will advise you, and I am sure whatever he tells you to do will be right. Dear me," she continued, after a slight pause, "if this unknown friend keeps his word, perhaps you will be rich, and not choose to be troubled with teaching. I shall be so sorry; that is, I shall be so sorry to lose you, but very glad, of course, of anything which is for your happiness. I am sure we look upon you almost as one of the family."

"Then let me stay with you as long as I can be useful," replied Hester, in a voice that showed her heart was touched. "I am little likely ever to be rich, but even if this unknown benefactor should render me independent—"

"Why, then," interrupted Mrs. Freeth, "then, my dear, there would be many things to consider, and, perhaps after

all, he will not make himself known at present, and meanwhile Phœbe and Jane will be getting on with their studies. I am sure you have done wonders with them,—not that I ever expect them to be as clever as Catherine."

"Jane has excellent abilities, I assure you," replied the governess, "and her warm heart quickens her intellect. Phœbe is certainly more volatile."

"I know that," said the mother. "I often feel as if little Jenny were the elder of the two."

"And yet Phœbe is, in some respects, very womanly for her age."

"Ah, perhaps other people see that more than I do," returned Mrs. Freeth; "it seems but the other day they were all little morsels in the nursery, and I myself young; and now I have a daughter married, and a son grown up. You cannot imagine how the last year seems to have aged me."

It was a very cheerful meal, that rather luxurious family dinner, of which Hester had been invited to partake. Under Mrs. Brindley's influence, the good cook was allowed to keep "her hand in," even when there was no company, so that dainty dishes were a matter of course; then the dining-room was cool and airy—a great thing in summer time—and the Wenham ice, now considered a daily necessary, was bright and abundant. Hester Otway was not foolish, not callous of nature, and therefore could not be insensible to the pleasures of refinement; she felt very keenly what a power for pleasantness money was, and could not quite hinder her imagination from building airy fabrics concerning the unknown benefactor. Nevertheless, she had decided to be entirely guided by Mr. Freeth's opinion with regard to the propriety of her appropriating any part of the money so strangely received.

Mrs. Freeth had given her husband a hint of the affair; but, of course, nothing could be said in the presence of ser-

vants. But when they had departed, and the strawberries were being leisurely enjoyed, Hubert Freeth exclaimed:

"I see Miss Otway so seldom, that I shall keep her for a comrade while I take my claret; besides, if I am to unravel a mystery, I must not have too many suggestors present. You can send us our coffee here, and we will join the ladies by and by."

There was a little laugh of assent, and, in due time, the hostess, with Mrs. Brindley and Aline, withdrew.

And then Hubert Freeth gave his best attention to the story of the day. Of course, he read the anonymous letter, and compared it with the direction; the hand-writing was evidently the same. He held up each bank-note to the light, and declared them all genuine; moreover, he observed that they were new notes, with consecutive numbers.

"These notes," he observed, his hand resting on the outspread heap, "these notes, there can be no doubt, are fresh from a banker's; they are no miser's slowly gathered store, but the change for some check or draft. It is, certainly, a curious incident. My advice is to invest the money—not spend it. Stay, let me look at the envelope again."

"There is nothing to remark about it," said Hester, giving it, however, into his hand as she spoke.

"Nothing to remark!" continued Mr. Freeth; "my dear young lady, I differ from you there. In the first place, this envelope has been folded in three; hence, I judge it has been sent from a distance; and some other hand than that of the writer has been intrusted to place the bank-notes in it."

"How strange!" cried Hester, with increased interest, leaning her elbow on the table, and her cheek on her hand, as she watched Mr. Freeth's countenance; "the more I reflect, the more unfathomable the mystery seems."

"I would not venture quite to say so," replied Mr. Freeth, and his manner had a little deepened in seriousness.

"I think I ought to point out to you that this envelope has, in all human probability, travelled from the Antipodes."

"Why so, Mr. Freeth? oh, pray tell me!" and as Hester spoke, she involuntarily shaded her face. A wild thought was beating for admission into her mind, and making her heart bound.

"Simply," replied Mr. Freeth, speaking very calmly, and not looking at her, "simply because the maker's name is embossed, though faintly, and not quite in the English manner; and I see the street is no London street, and it is followed by 'Melbo;' the remainder of the word is obliterated by the seal."

"You think it is Melbourne?" said Hester, in a husky whisper.

"I am sure of it," returned Mr. Freeth; "and, on second thought, I think you may venture to spend the money, if you like. Your scruples are very proper, but, to relieve you from them, let me be your banker. I will be answerable for the amount, and ready to restore it, if need be."

"Will you really take charge of it? then pray do so," said Hester, pushing the notes toward him, but recovering the envelope, which she reëxamined with a trembling hand.

"But keep a portion of it, if you in the least need money," continued Mr. Freeth.

"Which I do not; though I feel your generous kindness, Mr. Freeth, none the less."

"Nay, nay, my opinion is that you have a right to this money, and that you will hear again from this unknown benefactor."

Hester was silent for a little while, and then she exclaimed, with a passionate earnestness not common to her manner:

"Oh, Mr. Freeth, do not spare my feelings; tell me if your thought is my thought—tell me if you think my father must be living—you, who knew him so well?"

"I do think so. Moreover, I believe the letter is in his

hand-writing, and that this money came from him. *I* always believed that he did proceed to Australia."

"Oh, that my poor mother had lived!" sobbed Hester; "she would have forgiven everything."

"There was a mystery in his flight," continued Mr. Freeth, "which I never could fathom. It would be strange if, after twenty years, we should see it explained. I confess, I should like to know more of the messenger, the strange, faded woman Mrs. Brindley describes, and in whom her daughter seems so interested."

"I wish I had seen her," mused Hester; "but, I understand she did not part with the letter until she was on the point of leaving the house; and not guessing its importance, I allowed it to remain unopened for several minutes. There was no possibility of detaining or questioning her."

"She was evidently prepared to evade inquiry," observed Mr. Freeth; "and I do not think it would be generous, in the present stage of affairs, to make troublesome and public efforts to unravel the mystery."

"Not for worlds would I do anything to give *him* pain, if he really is alive," said Hester.

"Well, it is a romantic little history," continued Mr. Freeth, trying to give a cheerful turn to the conversation, "quite apart from any conjecture that can link it with past events. The shabby-genteel old woman, apparently subject to fainting fits—for nothing happened, I believe, that could possibly affect her?"

"Nothing, I should say. She had merely asked for me, and Aline Brindley was coming quietly downstairs, when the woman turned pale and trembled."

"The shabby old woman, I was going to say, looks, to me, like a trustworthy messenger; I feel positively interested in her. I shall get my wife to repeat her description of the poor thing over again."

And this Mrs. Freeth did a few minutes later, when her husband and Hester appeared in the drawing-room. After-

ward, Mr. Freeth withdrew to his study; and, while Phœbe and Jane played a brilliant duet, Hester was regaled with the sight of Mrs. Brindley's purchases, and acquired a "wrinkle" or two concerning the fashions, which she turned to good account in her own arrangements for the sea-side toilet she would soon be requiring.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT SHINGLEBEACH AGAIN.

BY the middle of August the Freeths were settled at Shinglebeach. The weather was brilliant, and they had a house even more commodious than the one they had occupied a year ago. But Mrs. Freeth was learning a new little lesson, and discovering that no sort of history precisely repeats itself; and that the pains and pleasures of domestic life evolve with as many differences as do the great events which swell the ever-unrolling chronicle of world-famous deeds and world-controlling circumstances.

The little town, with its esplanade and terraces, its stand of saddled donkeys for juvenile riders, and goat carriages for minute occupants, its pleasant beach and pleasanter pier, was absolutely unchanged. The voice of the crier seemed tuned to the same high pitch as ever, and the waves broke on the pebbles with the old harmonious roar. The sun dipped down in the west with all its well-remembered blazonry, and the moonlight nights scattered their *largesse* on the sea with all the olden lavishness, and yet—and yet Mrs. Freeth felt that everything was different from last year!

She was not happy, and she did not grow happier for being angry and ashamed of herself for her discontent. Perhaps, when Catherine joined them—so she argued to herself—her spirits would improve, and the enjoyments of last year would be resumed, and accordingly she wrote to expedite Catherine's coming; and when the day for her arrival was fixed, the mother counted the hours with tender

longing, and the flutter of happy expectation made her more cheerful than before.

For a wonder, Mrs. Freeth was a little selfish,—she wanted to be the very first to meet and greet her daughter; but, on second thoughts, and in consideration of her defective sight, she permitted Jane to be her companion, and theirs were the upturned faces at the bottom of the stairs which Catherine recognized as she passed the barrier at the railway platform. Kisses and hand-squeezing were the work of a moment; and, almost before words were spoken, Mrs. Freeth and Catherine were in the open fly, *vis-à-vis* to Reuben and Jane, packed close with shawls and bags, while the porter was taking charge of heavier baggage.

Mrs. Freeth would have said it was a very happy moment, and yet she burst into tears. Here was fruition of the long-desired meeting, and why should she be conscious of a vague blank disappointment? Catherine looked pale, it is true; but she owned to fatigue from a wearisome cross-country journey; and perhaps Reuben was more solemn and serious than of old, because he was sorry that Catherine was tired. This little train of reasoning flashed quickly through her mind, for, where feelings were the motive power, that mind was quick to reason; and soon Catherine, touched by her mother's emotion, grew flushed and tearful herself. And the flush looked like bloom, and the blue eyes sparkled through their mist with filial love and yearning tenderness.

This year Hubert Freeth had not held out a hope of visiting his family at Shinglebeach. He was far too busy, he said, to indulge in holidays; besides, if he could spare a little time for pleasure, he wanted to go to Switzerland,—he had got some notions about mountain tunnelling which he should like to verify by geological examinations; indeed, with this object in view, he should probably make time for a brief excursion. And as his wife had by this time discovered that Hubert generally contrived to achieve whatever

he "wanted" very much to do, Mrs. Freeth, in her heart, considered the trip to Switzerland a settled thing. Something to this effect she said to Reuben Appersley one morning, less than a week after his arrival at Shinglebeach.

"Then I think I shall run up to town for a few days, and see my uncle," he replied; "I want to speak to him about two or three things."

"But perhaps he is not at home just now," rejoined Mrs. Freeth. "You have no idea how he flies about the country; he gets a telegram from a superintendent of some of the works, and is off, perhaps, at an hour's notice."

"I think, as he is so uncertain," continued Reuben, "the best way is to take my chance. If you knew positively that he was at home today, that might really be a reason why he would be less likely to be found there tomorrow."

"Reuben," said Mrs. Freeth, with meek, good-humored raillery, "I am afraid you are like the rest of the men, and find Shinglebeach dull. Own the truth; we will promise not to be offended, won't we, Kate?"

"Well, aunty, it is not a lively place," replied Reuben, who was already sufficiently the married man not to wait deferentially for his wife's reply; "I do wonder what you all can have seen in it, to come here a second time. Why, even 'Punch' has had a laugh at the place and its one policeman."

"Now, I think it delightful," returned Mrs. Freeth, "to be in a place where there are no rogues and thieves to want the police, and where one leaves the street-door open from morning to night, without fear of robbery. Why, I left a shawl on the pier one day, and Teddy ran back and found it for me an hour afterward. And, after all, my dear Reuben, it must be more lively than Five Oaks."

"Ah, but at Five Oaks I am at home, and have my own interests and occupations. There are generally colts and puppies to look after, besides the crops to consider, either for plague or profit, as the case may be. And then one's

known to everybody. Why, I ride and drive for hours, sometimes, without meeting a stranger, or passing any one who has not a bow of some sort for me."

"But, Reuben dear," said Catherine, in a voice of great sweetness, and with almost a touch of tenderness in her manner, "Reuben, dear, you know that cannot be, except in your own neighborhood; and if you would but travel about a little more, you would soon grow to like new places, and cease to feel neglected or isolated."

"I know, Kitty; you have said all that before."

"Have I? I don't remember." Yet, in Catherine's heart, she remembered having thought it before.

"I shall come back to you in a few days," resumed Reuben, "unless, indeed, anything special occurs to take me elsewhere; and Kitty can write to me; and, perhaps, some day or another, I may grow to like rushing about the world. Meanwhile, it will be quite an event to have a letter from her. I declare, I have hardly seen Katie's handwriting since we have been married, and she has persuaded me to burn all our love-letters. I do think I shall go up to town this afternoon."

"Then I'll order the early dinner to be very punctual," said Mrs. Freeth; "and there they are, crying live fish just out of the sea! Reuben, which do you prefer, soles or whitings? They are both perfectly delicious when fresh caught,—at any rate, you can't get fish in such perfection, except on the coast; and it's so cheap, too!" she added, with the old accustomed thought of frugality, which was still a fitful habit with her, though no longer a principle. "But we'll only call it luncheon, though, for you must order yourself a proper dinner when you reach Telford House, if Hubert should not be at home. Your journey ought to give you an appetite; and, Reuben, be sure to tell them to put you in Lionel's room, because I know his bed is well aired,—Lionel being so little at home, his room is always on my mind."

"Thanks, aunty, for all your forethought; and I'll go to Telford House if you really wish it; but if, in your absence, it would be the least inconvenient, I could easily put up at an hotel."

"Oh, what an idea! how could it be inconvenient? And who knows? perhaps, after all, your uncle may be at home to receive you."

"And mamma and I," said Catherine, "will sit on the beach, and enjoy the sea and the sunsets, just as we did last year, and pity your want of taste in leaving us. Was it really, though, only last year? It seems so much longer ago to me."

"So it does to me," replied Mrs. Freeth. "I suppose it is because so many things have happened since last autumn."

"Yes," continued Catherine, "and I seem to myself so much older. I can hardly fancy I am not yet twenty. Reuben, dear, don't you sometimes feel as if I must be thirty, at least?"

"Kitty, how can I think such an absurdity, when I know your age to a day? But you do say such odd things sometimes."

"Well, dear, if I live to be thirty, perhaps I shall be wiser; I did not mean to be absurd, I assure you. Please tell papa that I, too, will go up to town for a day to see him, if he cannot come to Shinglebeach; only, not unless I am sure of finding him at home. And, Reuben, if you are writing home to your mother in a day or two, perhaps I need not do so till next week."

"Just as you like; but I shall be sure to write to her from London."

"Then give her my love, and say I am enjoying myself very much. I remember, last year, wondering if we should ever come here again, and I am grateful for a wish fulfilled. You know how I love the sea. If I were a queen, and had to create a capital, I'd build it on the sea-shore. The sea-

breezes would be sure to make fashion less frivolous, and give senators health and energy."

"Is that all that senators need?" asked Reuben, who was apparently pleased that Catherine had assumed a mirthful tone.

"Oh, they need all sorts of good gifts and great qualities," she replied; "and, above all, patience with stupidity, I should say."

"Thorough honesty of purpose would go a good way, I think," said Reuben.

"Ah, that includes so much."

"What are you both talking about?" interrupted Mrs. Freeth. "Do let us get out before the heat of the day."

CHAPTER XXVI.

REUBEN APPERSLEY'S PROJECT.

IT was past six o'clock when Reuben Appersley arrived at the London Bridge terminus. As yet, no Charing Cross extension, no underground railway, relieved the city traffic, and with less order and more crush than that of bees passing in and out of their hive were the busy London toilers pouring over the bridge, hurrying to the railways, or wending their way to and from the Surrey side of the metropolis. A large proportion of the multitude were coming in one direction,—coming away from the city; so that Reuben, lolling forward a little in the hansom cab he had selected, encountered their faces as he crossed the bridge. How pale and tired and grimy, for the most part, the people looked, taken individually! and yet the movement, the activity, the kaleidoscope changes of the throng, made up a scene of something more stirring than mere cheerfulness.

Reuben, as we know, professed to dislike London; but, since his marriage, an ambition had awakened in his heart with which London was rather intimately associated. It is this ambition, inclination, or desire—call it what we will—which brings him to town on the present occasion; for, before speaking of it to any one else, he wishes to consult his uncle-father-in-law on the subject. He is conscious of mixed motives, as honest people very often are, even in apparently simple undertakings; and we shall, in due time, hear his *pros* and *cons* discussed. Meanwhile, his very thoughtfulness sharpened his powers of observation, and

trifling, minute circumstances seemed to have meaning and messages to him.

It was a close, warm evening the last week in August, and the air was heavy, and the sky low. The cupola of St. Paul's, the spires of many churches, and all the taller buildings, seemed bathed in a golden mist, while the shipping below bridge lay still as in a picture; only here and there an empty wherry, moored to some heavier craft, rocked lightly and lazily to the rising tide. Little steamers, now stooping their funnels to pass beneath bridges, now halting, with noisy puff of featherlike vapor, to embark or disembark passengers, then shooting on, like shuttles to weave the city and suburbs together, were at this hour the life of the river, and stirred its surface to mimicry of the ocean. Reuben had time to look about him, and to become interested in the scene, for there was a dead-lock more than once while he was crossing the bridge. On the whole, people bore the delay with decent temper, as an annoyance of which use had taken off the edge. But here and there a high-spirited horse quivered and chafed at the stagnation, and more than one little dog, perched high on bales of goods, barked a shrill snappish bark, as if thereby to clear the way. Wagons and carriages, carts, cabs, and omnibuses, with occupants of every denomination, made up a motley panorama such as only the place and the hour could produce.

Reuben Appersley had never been so impressed with the magnificence of commerce as he felt this summer evening; and, as in due time the crowd opened, and he was driven at a reasonable pace westward, he was "liberal" enough, mentally, to acknowledge that town life might be endurable to some sorts of people, after all. He knew perfectly well that it was the dead season with everybody who is anybody, and, no doubt, everything in trade or pleasure was going on with a certain lazy indifferentism. Shopkeepers were lounging about their doors, seeking to inhale the breath of fresh air which seldom found its way to

behind their counters, and contemplating an early closing. Others were preparing, with flaming gas and attractive ticketing, to make those "frightful sacrifices" which, at the end of the season, are common, and always allure the multitude whose "hoard is little," though their "hearts are great."

By and by he skirted a theatrical district, and came upon parties of play-goers,—Darby and Joan couples disappearing at the pit entrance; shop-boys, with their pockets full of gingerbread, waiting at the gallery door; and the box company, with their white gloves and gay bouquets, and indispensable fans and scent-bottles, included many a bright-eyed girl, to whom Juliet was a sort of half-sister—though she had never owned as much, even to herself—and Claude Melnotte an ideal hero; but who, nevertheless, had laughter as ready as her tears.

Reuben did not reason or moralize about the groups of people he encountered, or the aspect of the London streets, but everything he saw fell into place in his mind, and deepened the impression he was receiving. Only a few hours ago, he had almost rebuked Catherine for feeling older than she was; and now he was conscious of something very like a sudden growth and maturing that had taken place in himself. Well, so much the better; so much the more was he in the right in his present aim. He did feel the responsibility he should be undertaking. Could any one drive through London, and not feel the responsibility of lifting a finger to the right or left in national interests—but why not he, as well as another?—and when he had such firm convictions and so many motives?

It was nearly seven o'clock when Reuben Appersley came within sight of Telford House, and as he did so, he, to his great delight, beheld Hubert Freeth ascending the door-steps. It would have been a piece of luck to have heard that he was in town, but to find him absolutely at home was an express kindness of the Fates.

"Why, Reuben," exclaimed his uncle, turning back, when the door was opened, to welcome his guest, "this is an unexpected pleasure; but I hope there is nothing the matter," he continued, a natural apprehension for a moment crossing his mind.

"Oh, no, uncle; I left everybody quite well, I assure you. I only came up to town because I wanted a long talk with you; and there seemed no chance of your coming down to Shinglebeach."

"Quite right. I haven't the time to go dangling there, throwing stones into the sea, and remembering all the while that I am a mile and a half from the telegraph office, and not knowing from hour to hour what may happen. And you have just come in the nick of time. Dinner will be ready in less than half an hour."

"That will be delightful," returned Reuben; "and are you quite alone?"

"Yes; I prefer coming home to dining at the club. And our cook almost spoils me. I have a suspicion, though, that that good kind Mrs. Brindley looks in every day—your aunt made her deputy in her absence—and the result, I assure you, is generally a case of Lucullus dining with Lucullus. We shall see what turns up for today. I have no more idea than the man in the moon."

"I believe I should do justice to a mere chop or steak," said Reuben; "but I was to be sure and ask for Lionel's room," he continued; "so I will go and wash my hands and brush the dust out of my hair."

What "turned up" when the gong sounded was a very small tureen of soup *à la Julien*, followed by a couple of red mullet (which Reuben was epicure enough to prefer to the "fresh whitings" of luncheon); then came dainty risoles, a morsel of mutton, and a grouse, with some slight confectionery and piquant cheese concoctions. Olives and apricots were a sufficient dessert for gentlemen; and Hubert himself took care that the wines were excellent.

"I am so glad you do not think my notion of going into Parliament ridiculous," exclaimed Reuben, who had introduced the subject over the first glass of Burgundy; this being the chief affair about which he wanted to talk.

"Not ridiculous at all; only, as our politics differ, my dear boy, I hardly see what use I can be to you. However, I must think it over; not that there is much time to lose, with the general election so near. But what does Catherine say on the subject?"

"I have not spoken to her about it yet,—that is, seriously. The only time I ever alluded to anything of the sort, she thought I was in jest; but I am quite sure she would like the interest, the employment for me; and, besides, she would enjoy living in London part of the year, I know. In fact, I would not mention it to her till my mind was thoroughly made up, lest a change of my plans should disappoint her. I am afraid Five Oaks is a little dull for her, poor girl." And in the tone of the last few words there was something very like a sigh.

"At your age," replied Hubert Freeth, "it would be good for you both to see a little more of the world, a little more of life, I think."

"To tell you the truth, if it had not been for this general election coming on, I should have proposed to Kate a trip on the Continent this autumn; not that she in the least complains of wanting any further change than the excursion to Shinglebeach, which she seems thoroughly to enjoy. Of course, it is natural that she should like to be with her mother and sisters sometimes; and I do hope the sea-air will do her good. I am sure that my wish to be in Parliament is a good deal weighted by the feeling that it would give her pleasure to see me of a little importance beyond my own county."

"And your mother? Have you any notion how she would like to see 'M. P.' after your name?"

"Oh, she would be pleased, I am sure. Of course, I am

not such a fool as to be over-confident. I may have to spend a heap of money, and still be unsuccessful; that I know. But I have another reason for wishing to try my chance. I hardly ever spoke to you, uncle, about my poor father; but I suppose you remember all the circumstances of his death?"

"Yes, I do," returned Hubert gravely.

"Well, it is only within the last year that I extracted all the particulars, and heard about the vile slanders that were circulated at the time, and there is a detestable radical paper, the 'Meadshire Chronicle,' that more than once has revived them; and the truth is, I want to make for myself a position in the world, if only that I may the more effectually scourge the rascals, and prove that, even now, the calumny may be exposed."

"I'd let the thing rest, if I were you," said Mr. Freeth, filling his glass, and pushing the decanter toward Reuben; "besides, if you were an M.P. tomorrow, I do not see how that could help you."

"No, nor do I exactly. But I feel that something might then happen to help me,—that I should have influence in certain quarters where now I have none. In fact, that I should be able to sift things to the bottom. It would be something if I could find out what really became of the man Otway, and whether he left any letters or depositions behind him."

"As for Otway," replied Mr. Freeth, "we have never had the least proof of his death."

"But you don't suppose he is alive," ejaculated Reuben, putting down the glass he had raised half way to his lips.

"Well, I'd bet an even wager on his life," replied the host.

"You do astonish me," returned Reuben. "If I understand rightly, advertisements were inserted in the colonial newspapers year after year, with the hope of attracting him, till every one was persuaded that he must be dead."

"Most people interested in him thought so, I am aware. But, whether he be dead or alive, my advice still is,—wait Besides, I think it would be a little cruel to his daughter to rake up painful memories of her father."

"I would not hurt Miss Otway's feelings for the world," said Reuben warmly; "but it seems to me that to vindicate my father is to vindicate hers. What an ass the man was to run away for the sake of a paltry two or three thousand pounds. Why, I'd have paid the money twice over to have kept him on the spot."

"You forget that you were then a little gentleman of only three years old,—there's a picture of you somewhere, I think, in a velvet tunic, and riding a rocking-horse. Perhaps you had a money-box with some lucky sixpences in it, but certainly not a banker's account."

"Still,—still, it might have been managed."

"Well, perhaps Mr. Otway did not exactly see how. I grant you that the running away seemed the rashest, maddest thing possible. But, still, my advice is,—wait; you know the proverb, 'Let sleeping dogs lie;' and many other things are best left undisturbed. If I were you, I would not be the one to stir up the old hornets' nest of slander."

"But if I could only prove that it is all slander! And as for poor Miss Otway, I would wish to consider her feelings at least as much as my own. It would be cowardly and unmanly to do otherwise; and I am sure I have a great respect and admiration for her individually, and I cannot, for the life of me, see but what clearing my father's memory from evil imputation must be doing the same by hers. Poor girl! I wonder if she will always be a governess. However, being in your family seems to agree with her," continued Reuben; "I never saw her looking so well as she does now."

"I am glad she is well and happy, for Hester Otway is a grand favorite with us all. I suppose you have never mentioned these family affairs to her?"

"No, never. I should have thought it most indelicate so to do, unless there were a real necessity,—some crisis of affairs in which she were, in a measure, concerned."

"That is well," returned Mr. Freeth, "for I have reason to know that she is keenly sensitive on the subject of her father's disgrace. Moreover, if Otway be alive, I think she will hear of him some day or other."

"But how can he be alive?" persisted Reuben.

"Why, he would be barely sixty, and we have never verified his death; why should he *not* be alive?"

"I only hope he may be. I only wish I knew he were still in the flesh, still able to recapitulate the evidence he gave at that terrible inquest."

"I wish so too," said Mr. Freeth. "However, let us return to your immediate and personal plans. And suppose, this warm evening, we take our cigars to the balcony."

Has it been said that Telford House was an old-fashioned mansion, renamed when the Freeths took possession of it? The dining-room, which looked out on what, considering it was in London, really deserved to be called a garden, had the luxury of a veranda and balcony, from which the view was toward the river, and toward what were then still called the New Houses of Parliament. The moon was up by this time, and, nearly at the full, was more golden than silver. It made the lamps along the bridges and along the low ground by the water's edge look pale and poor, as they shed their local lustre, for the moonlight flooded the heavens, and dropped some of its glory on the water and yet had plenty to spare for arches and columns, and all the traceries of Gothic fretwork. And, probably, the two rather matter-of-fact Englishmen noticed to themselves that it was a lovely night as they smoked their very good cigars, and made interjectional remarks between their whiffs. But, whether they knew it or not, their thoughts and feelings were influenced by the hour and the scene.

"Though I call myself Liberal," said Mr. Freeth, "I am

not much mixed up with politics, having far other things to engross me. And, now I come to think over people, I really believe I have friends of every shade of opinion. You, I know, are an old-fashioned Tory of the deepest dye."

"No, I don't think that; only a firm, consistent Conservative. I am satisfied that there will be a good many members of my way of thinking in the next Parliament; and the more I dwell on the idea, the more determined I am to try my chance."

"Well, my dear Reuben, I'll give you what introductions I can, and put you in the way of finding out who's who, and what's what. With a little manœuvring, I dare say you could get proposed for some place or other, without seeming over-anxious and solicitous."

"I hate manœuvring. I want to find some place where the constituents are not quite satisfied with their members, or where some one is retiring, and then offer myself manfully and in a straightforward way."

"Exactly so. You'll have to excuse me for the remainder of the evening, for I have some calculations to make that would keep me awake if I did not work them up out of my head, besides some letters to write; but I'll see what can be done the first thing after breakfast tomorrow. There are plenty of newspapers and magazines about the house, and the last 'Quarterly' and 'Edinburgh,'—have you seen them?"

"Oh, I shall amuse myself very well, and you must not let me interrupt you the least in the world. Besides, what with walking and swimming before I left Shinglebeach this morning, I am ready for a good dose of sleep, and shall be inclined to go to bed early."

"Well, then, good-night, if I don't see you again. I'm going to ring for coffee in my study. Shall I order it for you now, or presently?"

"I'll have a cup now, and just look at the quarterlies, to see if there is anything in my way in them; then to bed."

A "good dose of sleep" was an accustomed luxury with Reuben Appersley, though one only obtained by the "early-to-bed" system which prevailed at Five Oaks. But "early to rise" was a yet more persistent habit with him; therefore, though he did not realize his expectation of sleeping soundly, he was stirring long before the remembered breakfast hour. He wondered how he could have been so foolish as to be kept wakeful by his busy thoughts, or was it the strong coffee, taken late in the evening, which had made him restless? Yes, no doubt that was it, and he should avoid such a mistake in future. But Reuben had a great fund of perfect health from which to draw, and I am not sure that his faculties were not keener after that comparatively sleepless night than they would have been after many hours of heavy unconscious slumber.

With the morning's light he could not help looking about Lionel's room, which he was occupying, and it might be excused if he speculated to himself a little about his brother-in-law's position and pursuits. Lionel had not yet returned the money he had borrowed under such circumstances of mystery and secrecy; not that Reuben cared much about the five hundred pounds, though, just now, it would be acceptable enough; but he had a sort of elder-brotherly feeling toward Lionel, and hoped most ardently that he was not getting into any scrapes. Reuben had never for a moment fancied himself as intellectually gifted as he considered Lionel to be; moreover, he knew that he had not the same capacity for hard study; but Reuben, like a great many people who read but few books, and never pretend to literary taste, had a great deal of shrewd good sense, and it was a quality that had been very much developed lately. And, strange to say, without making him a happier man!

He loved his wife, his dear Catherine, as devotedly as ever; thought her as beautiful, admired her as absolutely, and saw no flaw in her mind or manners. And yet, grow-

ing up in his heart—though always crushed down as something he would not allow himself to recognize—was a sense of disappointment in his married life. Sometimes he felt humiliated at his own pettiness, when he thought it must be her superiority which threw out an impalpable frost-work between them. Sometimes he thought it was a mistake not having provided a separate home for his mother, and yet all his filial feelings warred against such a project. Besides, was not Catherine her own heart's desire for a daughter, though it could not be concealed that his mother loved authority, and that it was not Catherine who was quite mistress in the house. But Catherine never murmured at the small tyrannies which even he observed; and the conclusion was, that in temper Catherine was angelic.

Now, it was this subdued self-questioning which had served to arouse Reuben's slumbering faculties, and the heart always teaches in great sections. Compared with the Reuben Appersley of last year, he was a man of the world now,—relatively, I say, not absolutely. And this newly-acquired "man-of-the-world feeling" made him look round upon Lionel's belongings with inquiring interest.

Not that there was very much to notice. Just now, Lionel was understood to be making a tour in Germany with that intimate associate who had swum to his rescue when the boat upset; but I fancy that Lionel's rooms at Cambridge were far more crowded with personal properties than his room at home had ever been. It was a despised brace of pistols that Reuben noticed over the chimney-piece, and, between them, was a very different object. It was "Viola," as represented in a series of Shakespeare illustrations, published thirty or forty years ago, when steel-engraving was a reality worthy to be called art. Not the theatrical Viola of tinsel and paint, with stage accessories, but a figure of ideal grace and loveliness. Reuben knew the series to which it belonged,—had seen it more

than once on a drawing-room table; yet, as he gazed now at the Viola, framed and glazed as if it were a real portrait, there seemed to him a freshness in it, a likeness of some one he knew, though, at the moment, he could not remember of whom it was.

On the other side of the room was hung, in what might be called the second place of honor, a photograph of a young man, apparently about two and twenty, but muscular for his age, dark-haired, and thickly-whiskered. Photography was then in its infancy, and was even a more cruel limner than it is at present. Art, as yet, was only wooing it to be tender and gracious, or baldly truthful, at the worst; and the tentative photographic portraits of that day generally reminded one of all we should desire to forget in a friend's face, and recalled not one beaming look of love or gladness. Therefore, it is not surprising that Reuben failed to admire the likeness in question; and yet, like many unpleasing things, it exercised a certain fascination over him. He could not help studying the countenance of this young man,—handsome he undoubtedly must be; but the pitiless rays had revealed a look of keenness that had something animal in its intensity, and was hardly allied to the intellectual powers. Not that there was either vacancy or stolidity in the face, but there were weak lines about the mouth; and though Reuben Appersley did not profess to have studied physiognomy, he felt instinctively that this was the likeness of a man who lived in the present mainly, unchilled by fear, unwarmed by hope of consequences that lie in the future. He wondered what friend or acquaintance of Lionel's he could be, till, taking down the photograph to examine it more closely, he saw written at the back, "Cuthbert Rawlins."

"So this is the fellow who saved him from drowning," remembered Reuben, "and with whom he is travelling now. Well, I wish I liked his face better. But these newfangled portraits are always horrid things."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MR. BROWN, OF LINCOLN'S INN.

MR. FREETH had sat up into the small hours, busy at his plans and calculations; nevertheless, he had found time to think over Reuben's affairs, and he came down to breakfast charged with the good intentions which had resulted from his cogitations.

"The first thing we do," said he, "after I have been round to the office for half an hour, shall be to drive to Lincoln's Inn. I ought to have thought of Smith and Brown last night,—the lawyers, you may remember, to whom Lionel was articled. Most respectable men, and I am on the best terms with them. Whenever Lionel is called to the bar, I look to them to put things in his way, for they know what is in him. However, that is not the question now; but what does concern you is, that they are deep in election affairs, and always on your side in politics. I should not wonder if they are able at once to put you on the right track."

"I shall be delighted not to lose time," replied Reuben, "and, after what you have said, I shall feel in good hands."

Accordingly, before noon, Mr. Freeth and Reuben found themselves in a dingy doorway of Lincoln's Inn Fields, where the name of the firm, once radiant in letters of white paint, was now but faintly visible through many successive layers of London smoke and dust. But Smith and Brown had too extensive a *clientèle* for the legibility of their name on the doorposts to be of consequence. The long vacation, however, had just begun, and the clerks

were taking holidays by turns; thus the place altogether was quieter than usual, and very suggestive of that semi-drowsiness, which seems to pervade all business in the dead season. Moreover, Mr. Smith was out of town; but, after passing the due number of swinging doors, and awaiting the result of Hubert Freeth's card being despatched to an inner chamber, the two gentlemen were ushered through the clerks' office into Mr. Brown's sanctum, where they were received by that gentleman himself.

A spacious, well-furnished room it was, with Turkey carpet and solid mahogany writing-table, and morocco leather chairs to correspond, with the one easy-chair, placed with its back to the light, for the portly Mr. Brown's own occupation. A large glazed book-case stretched along one side of the room, and was surmounted by plaster busts of three eminent chancellors, while several fine engravings of other legal luminaries decorated the walls.

But, to the uninitiated, a trifle more order, a trifle less dirt, seemed wanting to make the room cheerful and comfortable. For the windows were semi-opaque for want of cleaning; there were cobwebs about the ceiling, and black dust lay thick upon bundles of papers and parchments. Yet Mr. Brown himself—a man in the prime of life, and who had a charming villa at Highgate—looked "well groomed" and fresh of toilet, wearing well-cut, well-brushed, fine broadcloth, but without finery. His hat, which was on a side table, was of genuine beaver; the gloves, which lay near it, were all but new; and a small looking-glass in the pier, well-dusted and bright, was probably consulted occasionally in all arrangements which required that sort of reflection.

Mr. Brown was the type of a certain class of successful men of the world. He meant well, and did well, but he never despised appearances, and never wore himself out with enthusiasms of any sort. His clear, rather steely-gray

eyes saw through the surface of things, yet measured, also, how much the mass of mankind are influenced by external impressions. But what, perhaps, astonished him more than anything else was the amazing stupidity of certain sorts of wickedness,—the chicanery and double-dealing which always meet discovery and disgrace sooner or later, and more often "sooner" than "later."

A model lawyer this to steer Reuben Appersley safely among the shoals and quicksands of an election. And when Mr. Freeth had introduced his son-in-law, and explained his wishes, Mr. Brown entered into them with due professional ardor.

"Upon my word," he exclaimed, "I think I know the very thing that will suit you. There is the borough of Fordinghill; it always used to return two Conservatives till it got bitten by Liberalism. But their present Whig member, from all I hear—and I know the place well, having been on the committee of the Tory members more than once—their present member, Mr. Raybrooke, has very little chance of being reëlected."

"Mr. Raybrooke,—Algernon Raybrooke? Oh, he is an acquaintance of mine, a young man I like very much," observed Mr. Freeth. "It would be odd enough if Mr. Appersley and he should be rival candidates."

"Why not?" exclaimed Mr. Brown. "There will certainly be two Conservatives offer themselves, and your nephew may as well be one; but whether both Conservatives will be returned, there is no saying. It will greatly depend upon the popularity of the other candidates. Votes may be split unluckily,—our free and independent electors so often mismanage their affairs. As far as I know, you are at present first in the field."

"I should think that a great point," said Reuben.

"Yes; and I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll telegraph to my partner, who happens to be holiday-making within twenty miles of Fordinghill, get him to run over and

sound some of the leading people—all in confidence, you know, till we see how the land lies—and you shall hear from me in two or three days."

"I think myself fortunate to have enlisted your services," said Reuben, with a sincerity that gave his words something more than the ring of politeness; "and I shall hold myself in readiness to go to Fordinghill and canvass in person, if you recommend such a step."

"It may be highly desirable to do so without delay," returned Mr. Brown. "At any rate, I will communicate with you directly I hear from Mr. Smith. But stay, you shall see and approve my telegram." So saying, he turned to his desk, and drew out the following message:

"Find out what chance for the Conservatives at Fordinghill. Young man of independent property offers. New to Parliament. Likely to be good for the borough. Answer."

"I would try to do my duty," said Reuben, as he handed back the paper. "I feel you have expressed my wish very kindly."

"Oh, the Fordinghill people are worth conciliating; a little old-fashioned, it may be," observed Mr. Brown, "but none the worse for that, in my opinion."

"All the better Tories, probably," cried Hubert Freeth, laughing. "Upon my word, I feel amused at myself," he continued, "playing into the enemy's hands in this manner. And I shall be downright sorry if Algernon Raybrooke is not returned somewhere. I really don't think he deserves to be unseated for Fordinghill. I know something of its affairs, and have reason to believe that he has served his constituents very faithfully with regard to their local interests."

"Ah, but they may not fancy so; there are two opinions on that subject, I assure you," exclaimed Mr. Brown, "though yours may be the right one, and the fault-finders may be only those who do not know their best interests.

However, Mr. Raybrooke is one of our rising young men, and will be sure to be returned somewhere or another. How I wish he were on the right side; how we would work to bring you both in!" And Mr. Brown rubbed his white hands gently together, with a gesture as of lavation, —a gesture in which he was apt to indulge when pleased with a fact or an idea.

The visitors soon afterward departed, well contented with their reception; the candidate for Parliamentary honors feeling that, though the rubicon was not already exactly passed, he had, at any rate, made a plunge into it.

By the next post, Reuben wrote to both his wife and his mother, apprizing them of his intentions; and to Catherine he suggested that, if she really wished to come and see her father, now would be the best time, especially as he felt he must himself remain in town for a few days. He even named a certain train, saying that he would be at the terminus the next day with the chance of meeting her.

Of course she came; and either the sea-air had already done her good, or the excitement of the journey and of Reuben's news had been pleasant, for she looked so well and blooming, that Mr. Freeth could not understand what her mother meant by being anxious about her. In his letter, Reuben had not gone into particulars, had not even named Fordinghill; had only mentioned that there was a certain borough spoken of, and that he was waiting for further instructions from Messrs. Smith and Brown.

How these names and Lincoln's Inn recalled the days when Lionel rose early and studied late, working with the ardor of ambitious youth, and no little of the energy of a self-reliant man, to acquire law and make himself a position. Looking back at that time, she fancied that every one about her then was happy and high-spirited, and able to fling back care, as one shakes off a snow-flake. Now, there seemed a dull disquiet in so many of the family. Certainly, she was pleased that Reuben was stirring himself to a life

of energy and usefulness, though she wished his political creed had been broader; but, after all, the breezes and sunshine of Shinglebeach had really tinged her cheeks, and deserved the chief credit in her improved looks.

Catherine had not travelled quite alone. As Burton had nearly completed her turn at the sea-side, and was now wanted at the town house, she returned to London at the same time, deputing herself to be Mrs. Reuben Appersley's personal attendant. Burton wished to ingratiate herself, —wished to put herself in favorable comparison with the "inefficient and insufferable" young person who was Catherine's own maid, and who had evidently not been thought of importance enough to be taken to Shinglebeach; the truth being, that the elder Mrs. Appersley had "strongly advised" her being left at home, having plans and projects with regard to needlework that she wished executed in Catherine's absence.

Hubert Freeth rejoiced to see his daughter look so blooming, and she could fairly congratulate him on his appearance. He seemed to have recovered from all the annoyances of last winter, and was full of schemes for the future.

"I must go to Switzerland," he observed, the day after Catherine's arrival. "I must make the geological survey for myself, and it is the only time of the year I can get away. I suppose the general election will be all over before I return."

"How I wish it were over!" said Catherine, with a smile.

"Do you mean to canvass for your husband?" asked Mr. Freeth good-humoredly.

"I!" exclaimed Catherine, with sudden surprise.

"Well, my Kate, I do not quite fancy you in the part of a lady canvasser," replied her father; "I was but jesting, my dear. Besides, the beautiful duchess who set the example in a past generation was a Whig partisan, and

you must be converted to rank Toryism if you are to help Reuben."

"I wish Reuben would convert me," said Catherine, smiling, and laying her hand on the table near Reuben's fingers, which were just then coquetting with a paper-knife. "I am sure I should like, beyond everything, to think precisely as he does."

Reuben took the hand placed so invitingly near, and pressed it lovingly, holding it while he went on talking.

"I wish I could convert you," he said; "but I am afraid you are very ready with objections to my opinions. Yet what does it signify; women cannot understand politics; how should they? though I own they are quick enough in finding weak points in an argument."

"You know, Reuben, I never talk politics without you lead me to the subject."

"Not with my mother?" said Reuben, laughing.

"Only when she introduces something of the sort, and I cannot be silent and sulky; and I must speak the truth as I see it. Besides, I think women may talk politics together. What I meant was, I never venture on the subject with gentlemen, or in general society. I perfectly agree with you, that women have not the opportunity of knowing and judging of any branch of knowledge in the same way that men have. With us, as it has well been said, 'the pursuit of knowledge' is always 'under difficulties.' Only, I think, in questions of plain right and wrong, and truth and justice, we must have an opinion of our own, and ought to be allowed to express it."

"I declare, quite a clever little speech!" replied Reuben, and he gave Catherine's hand a kiss before he released it; "but, for all that, I believe you have some strong, steady opinions of your own. So has my mother, for that matter; and I, being half way between her ultra-Toryism and your Liberalism, can agree with either more nearly than you can agree with one another; and Kitty, if you

like to take the credit, I believe you have toned me down a little."

"Why, I never thought anything I said or read to you made the least impression."

"Ah, but it often has, though. Still, I consider myself a staunch Conservative; far firmer in my views than many of those who take the name. But I have little hope of converting you; and I fancy, when we come to the hustings, you'll be more interested in Mr. Raybrooke's promises than mine."

"Mr. Raybrooke," murmured Catherine, who was taken by surprise, and hardly able to conjecture what was meant.

"Yes, Mr. Algernon Raybrooke, one of the present members for Fordinghill, whom I am to displace, if possible. But how white you have turned! What on earth have I said, my dear love, to distress you?"

"Nothing, nothing; it is only a momentary feeling; I have had it before now. And do go on; I should like to hear everything you have to tell me."

"My love, there is nothing to tell till we hear from Smith and Brown."

"I think it is time for me to write to mamma," observed Catherine, "if I am to save this post; and then I must dress. You know, I suppose, that Mrs. Brindley has heard of my being in town, and that papa has asked her and Aline to dinner. They are going to Shinglebeach next week, to stay a little time with mamma."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SOME CHIT-CHAT DISCUSSION.

REUBEN APPERSLEY was not kept long in suspense. Before dinner was announced, a special messenger arrived from Smith and Brown with a letter intimating that Fordinghill was decidedly ready to be wooed by a Conservative candidate, and recommending that Mr. Appersley should present himself in the borough with as little delay as possible. Mr. Smith was still there, and purposed remaining for a few days in the neighborhood, that he might receive Mr. Appersley, introduce him to some of the influential towns-people, and organize a committee. The whole thing was, therefore, well in train.

Mrs. Brindley was considered so completely the "friend of the family," that neither her presence nor that of Aline was any restraint on the discussion of Reuben's affairs. Indeed, she entered warmly into his views, and gave his intentions all the weight of her hearty approval.

"I am so delighted," she exclaimed; "if only that dear Mrs. Reuben will then live in London a good part of the year, and be one of us again."

"Yes," said Mr. Freeth, "we shall all like to have her in the season. The last time I saw Lady Hartrington she was lamenting over Catherine's exile from society, as she called it. Lady Hartrington is not narrow in her views,—quite the reverse; still, knowing, as she does, the best people, she has the feminine weakness of fancying that those who are out of her set are out of the world."

"How is Lady Hartrington?" asked Catherine. "I used to like her so much."

"Oh, she was quite well a month ago, and Sir Jasper too, considering his age. They are somewhere or another on the Continent for the autumn, like the rest of the world. Brilliant woman of the world as she is, I fancy she is a very devoted wife, and watches over his health most tenderly."

"I could believe everything good of Lady Hartrington," returned Catherine, with enthusiasm, "she is quite my ideal; if I thought I should live to be as old, I should try to be like her."

"It is well my mother does not hear you," said Reuben, with a laugh.

"I know that, Reuben," replied Catherine; "and I should not have spoken so frankly in her presence. She would have caught me up with a little scold, and asked what fancies I had about dying, and then objected to my ideal, and set up her own. Only, dear Reuben, when she is not present, I do not see why I should crush my enthusiasm."

"My love," replied Reuben, "I spoke more in mirth than anything else. *I* love to see you animated, and, upon my word, I think London air agrees with your spirits."

This little dialogue was a sort of revelation to more than one of the party. Hubert Freeth turned uneasily on his chair, as the conviction flashed upon his mind that Catherine, his darling, was not so supremely happy, and ineffably contented, as, in his masculine ignorance of woman's nature, he had supposed her to be. A certain love of freedom was with him a passion, and though he had his own notions of man's supremacy, he had not the least tolerance for one woman domineering over another,—no, not even a husband's mother, and that husband's mother his own sister. Indeed, there awoke to him lively recollections of his own early days, when the elder sister's self-will and persistent dominion were to him more intolerable than any other control. He reproached himself for stupidity in not having

stipulated, at the time of Catherine's marriage, that she should have a separate home and establishment, and, of course, he felt more than ever rejoiced at a scheme which might release his daughter even occasionally and temporarily from her thraldom.

Mrs. Brindley, with a woman's shrewdness—though without turning in her chair—comprehended something of Catherine's position, and secretly gave her just as much tranquil sympathy as her knowledge of circumstances and her character would permit. She thought, too, that it was a great mistake to treat married people like children, however young and amiable they might be; and that if Reuben Appersley were a dozen years older, there would be more consequence attached to his wife. She would have liked to see any one attempt to "catch her up" in her speech "with a little scold" when the poor dear major was alive; or, rather, she would *not* have liked to answer for the result of such an impertinence.

As for Aline Brindley, she only thought that the elder Mrs. Appersley must be rather a disagreeable personage, and admired Catherine for her evident gentleness and consideration toward her husband's mother.

Meanwhile, Catherine herself was quite unconscious that her words had made any deep impression. She had accepted her lot with its shimmering outside of prosperity and apparent content, its hidden disappointments and petty annoyances. But she was honestly striving to make the best of every circumstance; to stifle unavailing regrets which had an unclean horror when they arose, to compare her own tenderly-guarded existence with the tangible sorrows and hard struggles of multitudes of young women who, like Hester Otway, had to battle with the world, and, in short, to snatch from the life of each day whatever good it presented. It is so natural to be buoyant of spirits in youth, that, except for some terrible cause, she felt it almost sinful not to be happy; and it was from the buoyant feel-

ing of the moment she had spoken. As yet, the world was only partially unmasked to Catherine. She thought her own hidden sorrows quite special, and believed that such a life as Lady Hartrington's must be so rounded and complete that there was no loop-hole in it for trouble to enter. To be the wife of a man distinguished as Sir Jasper through life had been, and herself the idol of a brilliant, intellectual circle, seemed to poor Catherine the acme of human felicity.

There had been a short pause after Reuben's last words, and it was Mrs. Brindley who took up the ball of conversation, saying to Catherine:

"If you should stay in town next spring, I shall ask you to be *chaperon* to Aline sometimes."

"I should be delighted to be of use," said Catherine, "if you think I am really old enough for such a *rôle*."

"You are married,—that is quite enough," returned Mrs. Brindley. "Not that I mean to shrink from my own duties altogether, and dear Mrs. Freeth will help me, I know, in giving Aline a fair start in the world."

Aline's cheek flushed at finding herself thus the subject of conversation, and Catherine, sympathizing with her feelings, tried, with delicate tact, to relieve her embarrassment.

"This going into society," she exclaimed, "is always at first more or less of an ordeal; but, dear Aline, the plunge will not be so sudden with you as it was with me, and I assure you parties at good houses, where one meets clever people, are very enjoyable. And when you are under my wing, I shall take care only to visit pleasant people."

Aline thanked Catherine with a smile, and the look exchanged across the table showed a good understanding between them. Reuben also caught the look, and, in doing so, discovered that it was Aline Brindley who resembled the ideal Viola which he had found suspended over Lionel's mantelpiece.

"There is one thing I should like to ask your advice about," continued Mrs. Brindley, with some seriousness,

"for I have not, by any means, made up my mind. That is, whether Aline should be presented next year. It is true, I never myself had that honor. At the time of my marriage, Major Brindley did not care about it, nor did I. Still, as his daughter, Aline has every right to the distinction. Such a thing is always an advantage to a young person; don't you think so? And we might be presented together."

"Decidedly, it would be an advantage, socially," replied Hubert Freeth; "and if my wife had been less shy, and more inclined to such a proceeding, I should have urged her to it last year. I am sure it could easily have been managed; but she shrank from the idea as inconsistent with her position."

"There I don't agree with Mrs. Freeth," said Mrs. Brindley; "but, after all, perhaps the pleasure and honor would hardly have been worth the fatigue and excitement. Her position, even without going to court, is well secured, and is very much to be envied, in my opinion."

Hubert Freeth made a laughing bow, the most becoming return for such an implied compliment.

"And, surely, when Mr. Appersley is in Parliament, *you* would like to be presented," said Mrs. Brindley, addressing Catherine.

"I really had not thought of such a thing," she replied; "and, indeed, I don't see that it would be necessary."

"Oh, but so many things are pleasant and prudent that cannot be called necessary," returned Mrs. Brindley.

"But I am not in Parliament yet,—perhaps never may be," interposed Reuben.

"Oh, yes, you will be; I am sure of it," exclaimed Mrs. Brindley; "if not for Fordinghill, some other place will want you. But I think you will be returned for Fordinghill. Smith and Brown are wide-awake people, who would not be sanguine without reason. I have the highest opinion of them."

"You know them, then?" said Mr. Freeth.

"Yes; don't you recollect a little business that your son conducted for me in their office?"

"I think I do," cried Mr. Freeth; "when we were in the old house, and Lionel was articled to them, and very often he had papers to take round to Mrs. Brindley in the evening,—oh, yes, I remember."

"How is Lionel?" inquired Mrs. Brindley. "I have not heard of him for a long time."

"Oh, I suppose he is quite well; at Baden Baden, I believe, just now," said Mr. Freeth. "Extravagant dog," he added, "if I had known his great capacity for acquiring expensive habits, I might have thought twice before sending him to college."

This implied censure was very mild, and delivered quite good-humoredly. Yet the time had been when Catherine, and even Reuben, would have found some ready defence of the absent brother. Now they were silent, and it was Mrs. Brindley who said:

"Ah, we cannot put old heads upon young shoulders."

"I should be very sorry if we could," replied Hubert Freeth, with a laugh; "with the present selfish short-sighted stupidity of the world, things would be even in uglier confusion than they are. No, I cannot like riveted china, though the pieces match, much less when they don't; and the errors of the heart would be inexcusable if the head were twenty years in advance in experience."

"A very pretty defence of the young, upon my word," replied Mrs. Brindley gayly. "Aline, you are the youngest of the party, and ought to acknowledge it."

But Aline colored, and was altogether too shy to have any suitable words ready. This little speech of her mother's was something like touching a sensitive plant, and then telling it to be steady. Mr. Freeth, however, seemed well enough inclined to go on talking about his eldest son and sumed the subject by saying:

"I wish, if any of you see Lionel while I am away, you would find out what he really is doing. He ought to have made more way than he has before this vacation. I know very well what his abilities are, and how easily he can make up for lost time if he pleases; but still there is moderation in all things. It is not so much the money I care about—though, really, the long pull and the strong pull, and the pull altogether of a large family on the purse is something startling—but what I feel is, that money and time are spent together. All this boating and riding, and driving and rushing about the country, whenever there was a day or half a day to be snatched from the round of study, seems to me a sad waste of time, and so I told him the other day. I don't apologize for saying all this to Mrs. Brindley, because she is a sort of second mamma in the family."

"And in that capacity," replied the lady, "I give you notice that I shall always take Lionel's part. When in Rome, you must do as Rome does,—that was the old saying; and if Lionel's friends are mostly young men of fortune, how can he help spending money?"

"Again I say, there is moderation in all things, and that time and money go together."

"But remember, 'all work and no play,' that is said to make a dull boy, is it not?" cried Mrs. Brindley, who seemed today to be airing some musty proverbs.

"Yes, my dear lady; but 'all play and no work' is, to my mind, a still more deteriorating process. However, I don't mean to say that Li has not read and worked hard,—I am pretty sure that he has; but I don't want him to acquire a love of pleasure which has ruined more lives, so far as I have observed, than any one other cause."

"Who is the Mr. Cuthbert Rawlins that Catherine has told me about?" inquired Reuben. "The friend who jumped into the river after Lionel when his boat upset, was he not?"

"Yes; young Rawlins is his great chum. A young man of good family and great expectations, I believe. I think Lionel told me that Rawlins's friends hoped he would take honors, and wished for him a diplomatic career. And now the two are knocking about somewhere together at the German baths,—there is not much chance of Lionel reading up this vacation, I fear."

"Baden-Baden, I think you said," observed Reuben.

"I suppose so; that, at any rate, was last week's postmark. And he said in his letter that he had some good reasons for somewhat prolonging his stay there. Well," continued Mr. Freeth, "I suppose this is the last evening we shall have together for ages. If you go down to Fordinghill tomorrow, what about Catherine?"

"Oh, I shall not ask her to go with me on what may be called this trial-trip, though I should like her to be with me at the time of the election. But I will not take her now."

"Why not?" said Catherine.

"Would you really like to be with me?" asked Reuben.

"Yes," answered Catherine, "because we might afterward return to Shinglebeach together for a few days."

"I hardly think I could spare the time, I see before me so much to do. And when you were so near home, it would seem foolish to come back again,—at least, my mother would think so."

"Let Kate do as she likes," cried Mr. Freeth, who would rather not have heard this allusion to Reuben's mother. "What do you say to going off to Switzerland with me," he said, addressing his daughter; "I will take you if you care to go, and your husband will spare you!"

"Oh, no, no, thank you, dear papa. I will go back for another week to Shinglebeach, as I promised mamma; that will be the best plan. And, then, before I leave, Mrs. Brindley and Aline will be arriving, so she will not be without company."

"It is so kind of her to have us," said Mrs. Brindley.

"It is very kind of you to give my wife your company," replied Mr. Freeth; "and she knows she has *carte blanche* to stay at Shinglebeach as long as she likes."

Though Mrs. Brindley thought Shinglebeach a wretched place, the proposed visit there fell in well with her private plans; for an autumnal "change of air," on her own account, must have cost money, and she was just now rigidly economizing, in preparation for probable "court dresses" and other expenses which would be associated with Aline's "coming out."

CHAPTER XXIX.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

REUBEN APPERSLEY arrived at Fordinghill about the middle of the next day. He knew the place tolerably well, having often spent an hour or two there when making little cross country journeys; but, accustomed as he was to consideration in his own immediate neighborhood, he was not prepared to find himself so well known in the next county as now he proved to be. Perhaps Mr. Smith had judiciously paved the way for him; perhaps it was a fact that the young squire of Five Oaks had really a good repute, which had extended even far beyond Meadshire.

Certainly, he was received by the Conservative party with open arms, pronounced to be the man in the right place, his return as good as pledged by an influential section of the townspeople, his health drank freely at various taverns to the landlord's evident satisfaction, and the detriment of somebody's purse, and perhaps of the condition of the drinkers,—for there were tipsy men in the streets that night who shouted their laudable opinions about Church and State, and Queen and Commons, so vociferously, that, for their health's sake, it was thought best to put them under lock and key till the morning. Of course, he stayed two or three days at the place improving his acquaintance with the people, and hearing Mr. Raybrooke occasionally reviled as a mere dreamer and talker, who had shamefully betrayed the local interests of the borough he represented.

Meanwhile, Catherine had returned to Shinglebeach,

taking her dear old nurse, Janet Gillespie—*vice* Hannah Burton—with her; Mr. Freeth had departed for the Continent, and Mrs. Brindley and Aline were packing up their sea-side toilets, and making all their arrangements preparatory to locking up drawers at home and following Catherine.

Those few days at Shinglebeach, before Mrs. Brindley arrived, were never forgotten by Catherine and her mother. Not that any events arose worth chronicling in a diary, not that there was any special demonstration or eloquent outpourings of affection between them; but a subtle web of sympathy was woven to bind them together, and be something with which strangers might not intermeddle.

It was not whole holiday with the children, therefore Hester Otway was occupied in her vocation several hours of the day, and when studies were over, she was still, in a great measure, the companion of her pupils. Thus, Mrs. Freeth and her eldest daughter were the greater part of every day exclusively together, and Catherine was so matured, and Mrs. Freeth in many respects so naturally young-hearted, that the difference in their years was bridged over, while their relationship intensified respect on one side and tenderness on the other. Sometimes in families a day comes when the parent ceases to lead, and begins to look up, almost timidly at first, to the guidance of a child; though, perhaps, it only happens when the mass of humanity grows very thick and soft about the heart of the parent, as, indeed, it did in Mrs. Freeth's case, filling up many a little crevice and deficiency of character, so that, to the appreciation of that womanly attribute, she was far more lovable than are many more gifted women.

Their intercourse now had much of that running together of two women's hearts, which is the soul of feminine friendships; and woman's friendship, though railed at often, and seldom understood by the other sex, is surely one of the purest and sweetest and strongest ties on earth.

And, indeed, even the mother's love and sister's love wants one mysterious and supporting strand, if there is not mingled with the love a sympathetic yearning for frequent intercourse, and a mutual intuitive knowledge of feelings and inclinations.

A year ago Catherine had sat on the beach reading Locksley Hall, and thinking that the lightly-rolling waves made a music that was fit accompaniment to the lovely poem; dreaming, too, on her own account, many a vague and airy dream, as, with untroubled heart, she gave her fanciful imagination full play. Then she had felt, or thought she felt, that her mother did not understand such reveries, and did not feast at her own intellectual banquets. But now Catherine was conscious that she had passed to another form in the great school of life, and though still more keenly could she taste the luscious sweet, the tonic bitter, and the fiery alcohol of the poem which had so stirred her, she could also see, with clearer vision, the poetry of her mother's life.

Something of these feelings she attempted to express one day. The two were sitting by the sea where Catherine had been reading to her mother, but rather in a fragmentary manner, for the book did not fascinate. It had been recommended by the librarian, and had recommended itself because it was clean—rare merit in a sea-side library book—but its dulness accounted for the wholesome freshness of its leaves. And so, after moderate perseverance, they fell into the old accustomed chat about familiar things and close interests. It should be known that Mrs. Freeth was deeply interested in Reuben's Parliamentary project, though a little startled—one might almost say frightened—at the prominent part he was likely to take in the world.

"Oh, Catherine," she had exclaimed, "what a much more important position yours is than mine was at your age."

"Nay, mamma," returned Catherine, "I don't think so.

You were a mother at twenty, as well as a wife. And now that I am married myself, and see what a wife's cares and duties are, I am better able than I used to be to understand what a noble life yours has been."

"My love, what can you mean? I see nothing in my life but trying to do my duty as well as I was able."

"And is not that all that the best and greatest on earth are able to do? You and dear papa managed somehow or other to give me education, though really, when I remember what your income was, and see how money melts away, I cannot imagine how you paid my school bills and masters; however, I did learn a few things, and have read a few books, but I feel quite sure that I am not nearly so good or wise a woman as you are."

"My darling, do not talk in this way, pray;" and Mrs. Freeth was so far moved, that the tears glistened in her eyes. But she wore a large shade, which concealed the upper part of her face.

"Why should I not say what is the simple truth?" continued Catherine. "I so enjoy society, so need variety; I like so much what I am afraid can only be called pleasure, that I never could, year after year, have led the homely, monotonous life you did; at any rate, I could not have done so with your cheerful, contented spirit; that is what I mean."

"But, my dear, there was no merit, I was so happy through the years you mean."

"That you were happy is the merit, I think."

"How could I be otherwise? The marriage of your father and me was quite a love match, and though we had only known each other six months when we were engaged, I don't believe we could have been more attached even if we had been cousins, like you and Reuben."

"That I can well believe," said the daughter; "and now that I am beginning to see a little of the world, I am able, as I said before, to better appreciate what a wife and mother you have been. I sometimes wish that I knew how to take

a leaf out of your book, as goody-goody people say." And Catherine heaved a little sigh, and made a figure of eight among the pebbles with the point of her parasol.

"Do you know, Catherine, you are making me quite uneasy with these remarks?" said Mrs. Freeth; and then she added, as if from a sudden dread, "surely you and Reuben don't quarrel?"

"Oh, no, we don't quarrel, I assure you we don't. Reuben has never said an unkind word to me. What could have made you think of such a thing? And why should you be uneasy, dear mamma, at anything I have said?"

"That is just what I don't know! But I am very thankful you are so happy."

"Did you ever consider me of a thankless disposition, mamma?" asked Catherine, after a little pause.

"No, my dear, never! What a question!"

"I am glad of that, because I should like to know myself if I can. I do very often count up the blessings I enjoy, and yet sometimes I am angry with myself for not feeling more grateful than I do. I wish, dear mamma," she continued, as if from a sudden impulse, "I wish, dear mamma, you would go back to Five Oaks with me; then I am sure I should feel grateful."

"Oh, Catherine, what an idea! How could I leave the children?"

"Most easily. If I know Mrs. Brindley at all, she would be delighted to take charge of everything and everybody."

"I dare say she would," said Mrs. Freeth.

"And there is Hester Otway, also, to depend upon," continued Catherine.

"Oh, I have promised to spare Miss Otway shortly to visit her friends in Yorkshire."

"It would be a capital opportunity for the girls to take their holiday when they had Aline for a companion."

"Upon my word, Catherine, now that you have put the

idea into my head, I feel tempted to think it over. But what will Reuben and his mother say?"

"They will be delighted. Whatever Aunt Appersley's faults may be, want of hospitality is not one of them; this I must in candor say, though I am not prepared to defend all she says and does."

"She always had a temper, but I thought she never showed it to you."

"Did you? But temper is a thing that shows itself in so many curious ways. One thing I can answer for, and that is, that she will be very kind and amiable to you."

"Why are you sure?"

"Oh, I could give you several reasons," replied Catherine, with a little laugh. "In the first place, because she has not seen you for a very long time; in the second, because you are the mother of grown-up children, and just now she considers them a sorely oppressed class, deserving high consideration and much sympathy; besides which, she has got a scape-goat, and her temper is of the kind which only requires one scape-goat at a time."

"And who is the scape-goat?" asked Mrs. Freeth.

"I must not tell," replied Catherine; "it would not be fair."

"Not fair to whom."

"To either party. Not fair to Aunt Appersley, and not fair to the scape-goat. Do you know," continued Catherine, turning, though not exactly changing, the subject, "do you know, I fancy poor Hester was, for a good many years, a sort of scape-goat, though happily unconscious of the part she was performing. But aunt does not seem to hate her half so much as she used to do."

"That is because Reuben is married to you. Three years ago she was dreadfully frightened that Reuben would fall in love with Hester,—that was the reason of her hatred; now that her fear is removed, she can afford to be just. I am sure there did not seem any reason for her to take up

such a fancy, but take it up she did. I should not at least wonder, though, if Miss Otway were to marry extremely well, and she deserves any sort of good fortune. I will tell you, too, a little secret, though Mrs. Brindley and so many people know it, that it can hardly be called a secret." And then Mrs. Freeth related, in a tolerably succinct manner, the incident of the mysterious present of bank-notes.

Catherine listened with interest, and when the little story was finished, she exclaimed: "I should like to tell Reuben; indeed, I think I must; he would be interested in the occurrence, I am sure. It is so evident what papa thinks, and Reuben would be so glad to believe that Hester's father is alive."

"Of course you can tell Reuben; I should not think of asking you to keep anything from him. But I don't think it necessary to tell Mrs. Appersley; perhaps Miss Otway might not like it."

"I will ask Reuben not to mention it to his mother," replied the daughter.

"I wish, Kate, you would tell me who is the scape-goat," said Mrs. Freeth, after a short pause.

"No," repeated Catherine, shaking her head; "no, it would not be fair."

"I think I shall accept your invitation, Catherine, and go with you or follow you home. As you say, Mrs. Brindley will, no doubt, be very willing to take my place either here or in London, while your father is away."

"I am so delighted," exclaimed Catherine, and her whole manner testified her pleasure, "and I really believe the second change of air will be of great service, and set you up for the winter. I believe one gets all the good that is to be got from the sea in the first few weeks; you said so yourself last year. And Meadshire is not half so glaring for your poor dear eyes as the white cliffs and white houses here, and I know aunt will set herself to make you well, and be on all manner of 'hospitable thoughts intent.' The

fowls will be requested to lay their finest eggs, and the cows to produce their richest cream—"

"Catherine," interrupted her mother, "I thought you were to be my hostess."

"Yes, oh, yes, of course I am; though aunty is not one quite to give up the reins. Besides—though she might not be sorry for an excuse to continue manager—she soon found out that I was not—was not what she calls domestic."

"But, Kate, is that really the case?" said Mrs. Freeth gravely.

"Perhaps it is; I am not sure that I know. Sometimes I think I could manage a house if I tried, but I like so many things better than managing, that I have no objection whatever to letting Aunt Appersley rule in that sphere. Whatever my shortcomings, I think she feels that I am humble where housekeeping is concerned."

"Managing a country house must be something quite different from managing a London one," observed Mrs. Freeth.

"Quite different, and with different results too, as you will see. Oh, mamma," she continued, "I am so delighted at your promise, and feel quite ready to say good-by to poor dear Shinglebeach, since you will go home with me. I wonder, though, if we shall ever come here again?"

"You felt the same wonder last year," said Mrs. Freeth, "and we find ourselves in our old place on the beach. I have left off attempting to dive into the future, things generally turn out so differently from what one has expected."

Before the week was out, Mrs. Brindley had arrived, and had acceded to her friend's proposal; and before the day fixed on for Catherine and Mrs. Freeth to leave Shinglebeach, letters had been received from Reuben and his mother, expressing their satisfaction at the expected visit, and one from Mr. Freeth, approving warmly of his family being left under Mrs. Brindley's care; "another obligation," he said, "for which they could never make amends to their

inestimable friend." The project seemed to have the rare merit of pleasing every one.

"There is but one drawback," said Mrs. Freeth, when all the arrangements seemed made; "I have never yet been separated a day from little Lucy. Poor darling, she is sure to fret after mamma."

"But cannot we take her with us?" said Catherine.

"I did once think of that, and yet there is a difficulty about her nurse. The child is so good, that I do believe her aunt would be pleased to have her, but she might not like a strange servant introduced. Besides, for the last year, Lucy's nurse has helped with the other children,—I don't see how they could do without her."

"I know,—I know what we might do," cried Catherine. "It is not as if Lucy were a child in arms; I am sure Janet could take care of her. Let us ask her to go with us, and leave the nurse behind."

"Oh, that would be delightful," returned Mrs. Freeth; "and I believe Janet would be pleased beyond measure."

And so she was; and thus the circle of pleasure seemed complete. For Hester Otway was to pay her visit to Yorkshire shortly, and Phœbe and Jane, and Gilbert and Teddy, would have no regrets at being left under the kind care of the "second mamma."

CHAPTER XXX.

ELECTIONEERING.

A SHARP barking of dogs, as the carriage passed through the outer gate, was the first greeting of Catherine, when, with her little party, she reached home. It was a chilly evening early in September; there had been a good deal of rain in the course of the day, and, as they passed down the avenue, the trees looked cold and wet, and, to a fanciful imagination, as if they were weeping for the summer gone, and the wealth of golden leaves at their feet. The hour was just after sunset, but there was no moon, and the clouds—dull, dirty-looking clouds, just faintly tinged with color in the far west—hung low, without a star, as yet, having made a rent in their dark fleeces.

"The dear dogs!" exclaimed Catherine; "how I love their honest, cheerful voices!" and, even as she spoke, two or three great dogs bounded down the avenue, making wild leaps in joyful recognition of her, and showing off about the carriage all the antics of canine retainers.

Flickering light, suggestive of good fires, gleamed from several windows, and long before the little party reached the house, the hall-door was thrown wide open, and Reuben Appersley, preceded by Floss, hastened forward to meet and greet them. Reuben was delighted to have Catherine at home again, and delighted she should bring her mother with her as guest. Mrs. Appersley seemed not less pleased, and very soon took little Lucy from Janet's hand, and devoted herself to making the child happy and

vith Janet Gillespie, who courtesied "lowly
ly," with the old-fashioned grace, now so r
nd she gave Catherine a quick kiss, saying, "If
e by an earlier train, you would not have had
a ride."

, meanwhile, Floss trembled with delight and a
'loss had not capered as much, or barked as l
other dogs had done, but, indulging in little l
l kept close by Catherine's side, content wi
t on the head, which she returned by a dart of
above the gloved hand, where a morsel of
osed. The dog's love for Catherine had al
cessive and exclusive, and she often applied to
l Floss Mrs. Browning's description of a si
ent:

"And, because he loves me so,
Better than his kind will do,—
Often man or woman;
Give I back more love again
Than dogs often take of men,—
Leaning from my human."

even a fact that Floss was a real comfort
to her; it was as if the creature had a

drawing-room. In a playful mood, Catherine had once named the apartment the "Field of the Cloth of Gold," for the many-hued one in wool, because the picture of its winner was always a dazzling object; but, somehow, the name did not stick; and now, I think, had she been asked to designate the best parlour, she would have called it the room of the burning bush, for the strong, inextricably interwoven berry branches above the chimney-piece had impressed her imagination, till they were to her like an unspoken language in which every line symbolized strife.

Years had passed since Mrs. Freeth had visited Five Oaks, but she had old and pleasant recollections of the place.

"I declare, it seems but the other day," she exclaimed, when the first salutations were over, "that Catherine was the baby pet, to be coaxed away from Janet, just as Lucy is now."

"Ah, time works wonderful changes!" replied Mrs. Apperley, and the truism was delivered with a sigh.

"Of course it does," cried Reuben, who, latterly, had got into the habit of trying to stifle his mother's little sighs with mirth; "you would not have the world stand still, and pretty little girls never grow up into handsome women."

"Reuben, how ridiculous you are!"

"Am I? But, mother, don't hint at such a fact to any of the Fordinghill people, or they'll refuse their votes." At which retort his mother smiled; it was not her way to really laugh at anything.

It was very well to make a jest of the Fordinghill people, but Catherine was, of course, anxious to learn more particulars of her husband's canvassing than he had been able to convey by letter; and, as he had nothing but good and hopeful news to give her, the subject was very freely discussed. It appeared that the election was to take place within the next fortnight; and Catherine was instructed

to be lavish in her expenditure on red ribands—Reuben's color—and their bestowal in the household.

To buy the red ribands, to select a crimson shawl, and to order white bonnets ornamented with floral mysteries of the suitable color, formed ample excuse for more than one drive into Fordinghill. The youngest lady of the trio who went shopping was soon identified as the wife of the new candidate; and her natural gift of making friends rendered her, though unconsciously, a very successful canvasser.

Mrs. Appersley was nervously anxious, though she restrained the exhibition of her feelings. The only drawback to her pleasure, and to her approval of her son's purpose, was the doubt of his success, which would linger in her mind; for her pride was of that sort which feels any defeat a humiliation. She determined to be present at his nomination, and to hear him speak for himself. There was nothing new to her in election scenes; she had lived for nearly thirty years in the neighboring county, and had often taken interest in the Fordinghill politics; but to Catherine everything was strange. She had been a child at the last general election, and the whole world of English Parliamentary struggle dwelt in her mind with ill-defined outlines, such as school-books convey.

But now she feels herself drawn into the vortex, and taking part in the contest. She, too, will hear Reuben address the electors; and, since mother and wife were to listen, it seemed natural that Mrs. Freeth should also be present.

Catherine knew perfectly well that her husband would not be the only orator whom she must hear. But the whole affair of the election had come upon her suddenly, and she seemed passing through it as if, day by day, she were impelled to act by an unseen force. Perfectly well she knew that, at this nomination, she would see and hear Algernon Raybrooke, whom she had not met since the

night of the children's party, just before her marriage; for, of course, the rival candidate would expound his views from the platform. Since she knew they must meet some day or other, perhaps the sooner the ordeal was over the better; and the opportunity was a favorable one, for she might, by chance, see and hear without being recognized by him.

In admitting to her own heart that the meeting must have about it the touch of an ordeal, she had not a thought or emotion that was disloyal to her husband. But Catherine had probed her own heart too deeply not to know its secrets; and she could not hide from herself that Algernon Raybrooke had been an influence that shaped all her inner life. He had awakened in her soul a consciousness of possibilities which, in this world, could now never be realized for her. Multitudes of women marry and rear children, lead busy, useful lives, and have laudatory epitaphs chiselled on their tombstones, who not only have never tasted the Paradisal joys of a perfect mutual love, but, because they have never had its glory shown to them for a moment, have lived through a long life in perfect ignorance of their deprivation. Were they the better or the happier for that ignorance? Logicians, doubtless, might spin out arguments on both sides of the question; but Catherine would have promptly answered, No, not happier, not better. For goodness does not consist in a gradual lowering of the nature, such as must take place when that very tie which is made the mystical type of Christ and His Church is divorced from the purest essence of its spiritual part. And happiness is a lofty word, that we fitly apply to seraphic conditions; and is degraded when we thus designate a state of worldly content, or petty ambitions of mean pleasures or mere physical enjoyments.

Catherine had not yet brought her heart to say, "I wish I had never known Algernon Raybrooke; I wish I had never distinguished between the ideal marriage and the

life-tie which binds me to my faithful honest husband." Though, sometimes, she let her fancy have play, conjecturing how differently her life would have shaped itself had her marriage taken place a few weeks after her engagement. And it is likely that she was right in thinking that she would have been far less gentle and yielding under the encroaching petty tyrannies of her aunt-mother-in-law than she was at present. Undoubtedly, she would have either laughed at or resisted them; for the high spirit, which her secret trouble had silently broken, would have been a force offensive and defensive in every battle of life, and certain ignorances, such as her heart would have been encrusted with, benumb the sensibilities in a wonderful manner. She fancied she could see herself absorbed in her country duties, interested in agriculture, and even a little learned, by this time, on the subject of farm produce.

Alas! she fancied, also, that her interest in the forthcoming election would have been of a more single and enthusiastic character. Perhaps—for who knows how devoted she might have been to Reuben, or what might have happened under such altered circumstances?—perhaps she would have been brought round to Reuben's politics by this time; since, in the ideal marriage, it did not seem to her possible for husband and wife to think differently on great grave subjects. But now! though wearing her husband's colors, rendering him lip-service whenever her speech could help him; but forwarding his cause unconsciously yet more by the mere personal power and charm of her presence. She knew not in her heart of hearts what it was she wished.

The day of nomination came, and in a large old-fashioned open carriage, drawn near the hustings, Mrs. Appersley and Catherine and her mother heard the candidates address the multitude. Catherine was agreeably surprised by Reuben's speech. Though he had very little of an orator's skill; though his vocabulary was limited, and his

unaffected manner almost conversational; there was a manliness in his simplicity, and an honest heartiness in his words, which won upon his auditors, and predisposed them to trust him. The fellow-Conservative who shared his colors and stood beside him was an older man, and a far more experienced politician. In expounding his own views, he was able to amplify many of Reuben's statements while paying a compliment to his modesty, and the air was rent with acclamations in favor of the "red."

Then came the turn of the "blues." Of course, each party had its two candidates, and Algernon Raybrooke was the last speaker. No competent judge could have doubted that he was the most accomplished gentleman and polished orator of all who that day appealed to the enlightened burghers of Fordinghill. The half-truths which belonged to his party were so rounded by his eloquence, that only his stubborn opponents could deny their satisfactory completeness. But then Mr. Raybrooke had contrived, in the course of a year, to foster a great amount of stubborn opposition among his constituents. He certainly wished to be again returned for the borough, or he would not have been there that day; but it was with a divided inclination, after all. He would have been well content to spend the next year or two in travel and in watching public events; but yet he desired the opportunity of righting himself with the Fordinghill people, and proving to them that he understood their interests better than they did themselves. But directly he touched upon local affairs—those local affairs in reference to which he had been accused of indifference and neglect—his words were drowned in the storm of hisses his explanation had called forth. All further attempts at making himself heard were unsuccessful; and after standing for awhile with folded arms, contemplating the noisy mob, and not controlling the expression of angry scorn which rested on his face he made a ceremonious bow, and withdrew.

"What a shame!" whispered Mrs. Freeth, who, however, was quite aware that it was not exactly her place at that moment to sympathize with Reuben's rival; "what a shame to treat him so badly! Oh, how frightened I should have been if they had hissed Reuben, and stopped him in that rude way. Luckily, Mr. Raybrooke does not seem to have any ladies belonging to him, or they might have got insulted too. Poor fellow! and I know all he was telling them is quite true; it is just what I have heard Hubert say over and over again."

"Hush, Bessie, for heaven's sake!" exclaimed Mrs. Appersley; and she continued, "What can you know about Mr. Raybrooke and the canal business?"

"A good deal, I assure you," replied Mrs. Freeth, with more warmth than belonged to her usual manner; for, to own the truth, she was not now quite so easily "put down" by her sister-in-law as formerly. "Mr. Raybrooke visited at our house last winter—came to the children's Christmas party, M.P. though he was—a most nice, gentlemanly young man, and I heard Hubert talk about that very canal affair, saying what the townspeople wanted was quite ridiculous and preposterous."

"Well, well, my dear Bessie," said Mrs. Appersley, "my brother may be right, but he is not infallible."

"Not in such a thing as that?" interrupted the faithful wife, to whom such words were a sort of petty treason. "Why, if he don't know all about canals and railways and viaducts, I wonder who does!"

"But, even if he is right," resumed Mrs. Appersley, growing irate at anything like an argument, "it is not for us to say such things."

"Of course not," said Mrs. Freeth; "and I spoke so low that I am sure no one but you and Catherine could possibly hear. I do feel for Mr. Raybrooke very much, and I don't see why I should not say so among ourselves. How I wish they would elect him and Reuben both!"

"That would never do," said Mrs. Appersley; "it would be as bad as having no member at all."

"Why so?"

"Aunty means," interposed Catherine, "that two members of opposite politics would be always voting against each other, and so neutralizing one another's votes."

"Ah, I see," replied the gentle, unpolitical Mrs. Freeth; "what a pity! It would have been so nice. Now, it does seem a little as if Reuben were turning a friend out."

"No, mamma, dear," said Catherine; "you forget that Reuben does not know Mr. Raybrooke; he cannot possibly be called his friend." The words were rather pleasant words, under the circumstances, and yet they came forth with something very like a little sigh.

"Well, I did forget; but I remember now. Reuben was not with us at the time of the children's party. But he must have heard us talk about him."

"I know papa mentioned him when we were in town."

"And you, Catherine,—did you never talk about him, meeting him at Lady Hartrington's as you did, and knowing him quite well? Though, of course, it is natural now that you should be absorbed in Reuben's election."

"Which I think we may consider as pretty sure," replied Catherine.

"Kate," said Mrs. Appersley, after a little pause, and she sat opposite to her daughter-in-law, "how pale you look! What is the matter; are you ill?"

"I don't feel quite well; I suppose it is the excitement of the scene. I was going to ask mamma, if she does not mind, to change seats with me, so that I may not ride home backward."

"I will change seats with you," said Mrs. Appersley. "Yes; pray let me," she continued, laying her hand on Mrs. Freeth's arm; "I have no fid-fad fancies about riding backward; but you *are* delicate, I know, and I won't allow

it. Only I thought Catherine was too much of a Freeth to be affected by such trifles."

"Nor am I generally; and, after all, it is of no consequence, and I feel better now; so pray, aunt, keep your seat."

"No, no; I won't have you go home ill;" and Mrs. Appersley, of course, had her will.

They waited till Reuben could join them, and take the fourth place in the roomy barouche; so it fell out that Catherine faced both husband and mother-in-law during her drive home. Reuben was so sorry for her headache, so pleased at her praise of his speech, and folded her hands so caressingly in his when he leaned forward to speak, that Catherine was touched to tears. It was a curious fact that Catherine always felt most tender toward her husband when her mood was one of rebuke to herself.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RIVAL CANDIDATES.

THE election was over. Two Conservatives were returned for Fordinghill, Reuben Appersley being at the head of the poll.

It was a clear autumn day, with a light breeze from the west, which just fluttered the party-streamers that dangled from the windows of the High street, and kept from drooping the various flags which decorated some of the more important buildings. Reuben, of course, was in the town, ready to make his acknowledgments to the enlightened constituents, and he did so briefly and frankly, and pleased the people mightily. Algernon Raybrooke watched the proceeding, and smiled to think how, little more than a year ago, he had been similarly greeted. By the way, he, the "Liberal" candidate of certainly "advanced" opinions, had in his heart of hearts a thorough scorn for the "cry of curs." Apart from all the accidents of birth and position, his nature was patrician; and his claim for more light, more liberty for all classes, was that they might have freedom to rise out of the slough which oppressed so many among the masses, and made them, by the force of circumstances, despicable to him. At the same time, he felt a little despicable to himself for having stooped to electioneering tactics,—for having flattered and coaxed, and doubly despicable for his failure. The provoking thing was that Sir Richard would be vexed and disappointed at his present discomfiture, and perhaps not quite ready to believe that he, Algernon, had not been to blame.

It was, therefore, in no very pleasant mood that he took leave of the Fordinghill electors. Indeed, in the little speech he thought proper to make after the new members had said their say, he was slightly ironical, and, under soft-sounding phrases, something contemptuous made itself felt. But it was a brutal thing to hustle him as they did, when he descended from the platform, and a thing to which he was in no humor to submit. He bore it patiently at first, but a "rough" approached him with mischief in his manner, and then Algernon thought it was time to show that there was a "thus far and no farther" to go with him. Accordingly, he seized the man by the strongest remains of his tattered collar, and hurled him some paces away. Then, taking off his gloves, he threw them into the street, as if to mark his disgust for the creature he had touched.

The action was like lighting a train. Fists were clenched and foul language used, and missiles hurled at Algernon from several directions.

Reuben Appersley felt shocked at the scene, and a cry of "shame" escaped his lips; but when he saw Algernon turn pale and red from the sickening blow of a stone which he had received on his forehead, the new member could restrain himself no longer, but, springing to the side of his late opponent, became himself his protector.

This new turn of affairs amused the fickle mob, and it made way, amid nothing more hurtful than jeers and laughter, for the two gentlemen to pass. It was high time, for Mr. Raybrooke was really hurt, and too thankful for help and succor to much notice whence it came, he allowed himself to be led by Reuben to his hotel, whence medical assistance was summoned.

Perhaps the doctor was a fussy country practitioner, who used more violent remedies than were needful; perhaps he was really only skilfully prudential. But he ordered his patient to bed, and applied leeches to his head.

Reuben was infinitely distressed at the conduct of the mob, while Algernon's whole behavior so won upon him, that he felt strangely attracted toward him. Half stunned by the blow, and suffering extremely, Algernon Raybrooke was still able to make his acknowledgments, and point out to Reuben how necessary it was that he should leave him, and keep some appointments he had.

"Yes, yes," replied Reuben; "but I assure you I have still a good half hour to spare. And, Mr. Raybrooke, I have a proposal to make. I must sleep at Fordinghill to-night. If you are better tomorrow—well enough to bear a long drive in an easy phaeton; not half so fatiguing, you know, as the jar of a railway—will you come with me to Five Oaks, and be my guest till that ugly bruise is gone?"

"You are too good,—too good," ejaculated Algernon; "but I hardly think I dare go. And what would the Fordinghill people say to such a visit?"

"Say! why, they ought to be thankful that you should be among their friends, while you bear such a badge of their disgraceful conduct."

"A kind and courteous way of putting your invitation. I assure you I feel it so. Mr. Appersley, do you know you are a great tempter?"

"I shall not think so if I do not tempt," laughed Reuben. "But you will come; and you will not find yourself with strangers. You know my relations, the Freeths? and Mrs. Freeth is with us just now; and perhaps you recollect my wife? I know she remembers you."

"She does me honor," replied Algernon, who, for a moment, speculated as to how much the bruise disfigured him.

"All the womenkind are capital nurses," continued Reuben, "so I shall fully expect you. I shall tell your man to pack up the few things you may want."

"You have tempted," said Algernon, grasping Reuben's hand as he spoke.

Algernon was really touched by Reuben's hospitable wish, and, though he was conscious of feeling curiosity to behold Catherine in her new estate, he did not recognize a disloyal or unworthy thought in his own heart. Did not "recognize," but, for all that, he was morally weak. It was in his nature to toy with danger, when he thought it was only himself who could suffer. Morally weak was he, and yet imaginatively strong and generous. Because he knew that he ought to rejoice that Catherine's husband was, after all, a "fine fellow," he positively believed that he did. Because he knew that he ought to look upon her with only icy admiration and friendly regard, he thought all other memories could be stifled; and he argued—and here was, at least, a grain of soundness in the plea—that as, probably, they would often meet in society, the sooner the first plunge was over, the better. Be it generously remembered that Algernon was wholly without suspicion that Catherine had suffered through him. Had he known all the truth, there were just two things he would have done.

Had the knowledge come one minute before the marriage ceremony had commenced, he would have borne her away from the altar, or seen "the reason why." Had it come as a dreadful knowledge one minute too late, he would have put seas and mountains between them, and have shunned seeing her for years.

Reuben sent a hurried note to his wife, in accordance with which a guest-chamber was made ready; and with that calmness which is becoming when we await the inevitable, Catherine prepared herself to play hostess to Algernon Raybrooke. She also felt strong in her own strength, and summing up all the advantages of her lot in life, she set herself resolutely to admiring and contemplating them. After all, this want of intellectual sympathy with her immediate associates, which she recognized as the great drawback to her happiness, was it not the mere morbid

craving of youth? If it was, she must conquer it; if it was not, surely she would meet with congenial minds in the world some day or another, and would cease to feel that there had been only one being to whom her nature seemed thoroughly to respond.

These reflections had the effect of adding a trifle of dignity to her manner when she received Algernon, and bade him welcome to Five Oaks. But the trifle of dignity was, perhaps, an additional, though momentary, charm. A generous and genial nature only continually wears gracefully its ordinary amount of dignity, and least of all finds it easy to be stately or cold to an invalid guest.

It was Catherine's habit to meet her husband at the threshold, and now that she had to see him for the first time as member for Fordinghill, their greeting had naturally a little extra demonstration. Catherine had heard the wheels, and had seen the phaeton rolling with slackened pace along the avenue. The dogs, as usual, bounded and barked, doors were thrown wide open, and a groom hurried from the stables to be ready for the horses. Reuben sprang out, and then assisted his guest, who looked pale, and leaned upon a stick. And Catherine found that she had shaken hands with Raybrooke before her husband took her in his arms, with what his mother called a "bear's hug," and gave her a hearty kiss.

"Something to eat,—give us something to eat," was his first exclamation. "We are as hungry as hunters,—at least, I am, and I hope Mr. Raybrooke, who was dinnerless yesterday, has recovered his appetite."

"You forget I am in the doctor's hands," said Algernon, with a smile.

"Ah, but the doctor said you were not wholly to starve; and he named claret for your wine, I remember that. Kitty, you know the Château Margaux,—will you look after it yourself, there's a darling! I want to go round to the stables while Mr. Raybrooke washes his hands."



"Oh, let me not trouble Mrs. Appersley," said Algernon, who, if he had been married, would about as soon have thought of asking his wife to saddle his horse as to go to the wine-cellar. Yet he had too much tact to say more, especially as Catherine quickly replied, "Oh, I am very often butler, I assure you."

And so she was; and, for this reason, Reuben had a certain manly laziness, and liked being waited on; and Catherine always obeyed his instructions literally and exactly, whereas his mother, had she been intrusted with the wine-cellar key, would have brought up just what *she* considered right and desirable, or else had an argument to establish the why and why not.

But the little incident was, I think, unlucky; it made Raybrooke notice many trifles which turned his thoughts into the channel of compassion.

Mrs. Freeth, whom he liked because she was Catherine's mother, and whose sweet womanly qualities he had penetration enough to appreciate, Mrs. Freeth greeted him cordially, lamenting his illness, and the treatment he had received. There was no ignoring that blurred discoloration, which certainly branded Fordinghill more even than it disfigured him.

Mrs. Appersley, senior, who always thawed to a guest, and with whom hospitality was a cardinal virtue, made herself as pleasant as she could to a stranger, with whom it would hardly be too much to say that she had not an opinion in common.

Raybrooke was an accomplished gentleman, and, as such, could not be other than deferential to the mother of his host. But where people are born to clash, as they certainly were, indications of temperament will make themselves felt, even under the most polished exterior. Mrs. Appersley was not a reading woman, and she cared not for music, and knew little of art. Thus many a lovely neutral ground, on which very opposite people may meet, were not

open to them, and when one stays a week in a country house, with a small circle that one meets every day at every meal, it is really necessary to find something safe to talk about to every member of it. Mrs. Appersley called herself an orthodox Churchwoman. She was, in reality, rigid, formal, narrow; and, as far as one frail mortal may dare to judge of another, be it said, with only the dry unvitalized skeleton of faith. Raybrooke was a latitudinarian, too frank to call himself more of a believer than he was. Mrs. Appersley was an old-fashioned, "red-hot" Tory; Raybrooke an "advanced Liberal," of the new school of politics. He was philosophic, with much of the philosophy falsely so called,—poetic, theoretic, artistic, oratoric, enthusiastic, and many-sided. She was practical and matter-of-fact, but not dull; on the contrary, she was shrewd, piercingly shrewd, as far as her faculties and training permitted, and within her own narrow limits.

Algernon Raybrooke remained a week at Five Oaks, by the end of which time, and though the current of perfect politeness had never been ruffled, a tacit but settled feeling of mutual detestation was established between him and Mrs. Appersley, senior. On the other hand, Mrs. Freeth had grown to like him very much indeed, and when they parted, it was with many expressed wishes that he would be a frequent visitor at Telford House.

To Catherine, that week was a very memorable period. The keenest censor of morals and manners would not have found fault with word or action of Algernon Raybrooke. Without too much ignoring their past acquaintance, he in no way behaved as if it had been less slight than to the majority of the lookers-on it had appeared to be. He did not take up the "dropped thread," as he had done on a former occasion, but he rendered the new topics which were started at the least as interesting. Above all, there was an indescribable difference of manner, which made intercourse with him much more easy than she had expected it to be.

It was no one's fault, only in the natural course of events, that the broad distinctions of character and training between Algernon Raybrooke and Reuben Appersley should become more than ever apparent in their new relations of host and guest. And this, though they filled their relative parts equally well, all things considered. Nor was the contrast always in Algernon's favor; there were many topics, and often those on which information would be very useful to a member of Parliament, on which Reuben was the better instructed, though he was deaf and blind to the *nuances* of literary criticism, and the esoteric views of life.

It was a result of Algernon's visit to Five Oaks that Catherine no longer looked forward with dread to meeting him in general society.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE TACIT UNDERSTANDING.

HUBERT FREETH was still in Switzerland, and his family scattered, as we know. It must have been at least equal holiday-making for some considerable period to the servants at Telford House, seeing what ample time they had had for putting the house in order. To be sure, curtains were still folded up instead of hung, and the stairs were carpetless, and the chimney ornaments were not arranged, and the rugs were in no case unrolled, for Burton, who was chief directress of affairs, knew that she should have a week's notice of the return of the family, and had no notion of having to do things needlessly over again.

Not that Burton was an idle woman, but she really had a good many affairs on her mind just now. She was not quite content with her own progress upward in the world. She had good wages, it was true, but never was there a place with less indirect gains, Mrs. Freeth having absurd notions about the sinfulness of what she called waste, wearing things till—so Burton thought—she ought to be ashamed, or else giving them away according to her own discretion; not passing them to her servants with a "Never let me see that any more," as a real lady would do. Burton, lady's-maid though she was, had volunteered to make herself useful in a general way while the family were absent, the truth being that, in a quiet manner, she was "setting her cap" at Mr. Parkins, the gentleman out of livery, and had thought the present oppor-

tunity for advancing the flirtation a very favorable one. The cook was fat, fair, and forty, if she was a day; there only remained of womankind in the house to compete with her the second housemaid, with her doll's face, and the gawky kitchen-girl.

Somehow or other, however, Burton was not satisfied with the progress of events. If there had been any incipient rivalry during the summer, it was a pity Burton went to Shinglebeach, for the doll's face had made way during her absence. Worthy Mr. Parkins was but mortal man, and mortal men will, while the world lasts, bow to the influence of rosy cheeks and bright eyes, and a carolling voice that sets work to music, and seems the pledge of a cheerful temper. Then Burton was just of the age when even much better women grow a little bitter toward the *beauté de diable* of youth, though, a score of years later, they veer round and admit its fascinations unreservedly.

Altogether, Hannah Burton was in an especially discontented, spiteful frame of mind one particular evening, for Mr. Parkins had taken "doll's face" to the play, with the fat cook for *chaperon*. To be sure, he had said that he knew it was a mere compliment to ask Mrs. Burton to go, as it would not do for so many of them to be absent together; in which opinion she very properly coincided. Though still September, the weather was cold and raw, with a fog coming on that seemed borrowed from November; when, just as the hall-clock had struck eight, a cab rattled up to the door, a loud knock and ring followed, and the next minute Lionel Freeth and Cuthbert Rawlins, with certain carpet-bags and portmanteaux, were in the hall.

Burton had opened the door promptly, for she had been sitting in the dining-parlor, where she had lighted a fire,—for the sake of the pictures, she said; and she ushered the two young men into the room with an air of satisfaction at the circumstance.

"Lucky there's a fire, at any rate," exclaimed Lionel.

"And now, Burton, who is in the house, and what can we have to eat?"

"Well, sir, we are a small party, but, luckily, cook did not go to the sea-side; people of the house there do the cooking for Mrs. Brindley and the young ladies; and to-morrow, I'm sure, sir, we can make you very comfortable; but tonight,—just tonight, there's only the kitchen-maid at home."

"But surely she can cook us a chop, or is there nothing else in the house she can send up?"

"Yes, sir," replied Burton; "there's cold roast beef, if that will do,—as fine a sirloin as you can wish, roasted only today; upper side not cut, on purpose that there might be a nice supper after the play."

"Oh, the rest are at the play, are they? Quite right to enjoy themselves; only please to let us have up the beef; some slices of the upper side will be quite a treat after two months out of England. And, Burton, will you get a room ready for Mr. Rawlins? he will stay here for a few days."

It was promotion for the gawky kitchen-maid to cook for the family, and she seized the occasion with avidity, though it was only to boil and mash potatoes, while Burton condescended to lay the cloth. No wine was accessible, but of bottled beer there was abundance; and on Cuthbert Rawlins saying something about brandy-and-water, Burton recollected a bottle of *vieux cognac* hardly touched, which stood in the butler's pantry.

Getting the bedrooms ready at that time of night made the two women busy for upward of an hour. Meanwhile, with everything within their reach, waiting was not considered necessary by Lionel and his guest.

They were young men, be it remembered, and healthy and hungry; they were cold and tired after a day and night of incessant travelling; and, under such circumstances, good food, with a blazing fire, might have been

expected to enliven them prodigiously. But it did not. These boon companions of the other day were singularly taciturn now.

After supper, Cuthbert Rawlins helped himself to the *vieux cognac* which he had so much desired, and Lionel, as host, mixed a small quantity with water, to keep his guest company. But he scarcely touched the mixture, and soon rose from the table, to stand in the Englishman's most detestable fashion, with his back to the fire.

There had been a pause of ominous duration, like that hush of the elements which preludes the few big drops of rain when a thunder-storm is to follow presently. Lionel it was who broke the silence by exclaiming,—

"I hope, Rawlins, you thoroughly understand me; I wish there should be no mistake."

"I ought to understand you," replied the other, "for you've spoken deucedly plain."

"In offering you the hospitalities of my father's house, until you can see your way a little, I know I am only doing what he would desire. But more money I cannot furnish. Cuthbert, I do not wish to be severe, but the entanglements into which I have been drawn, and the sight of that slough of disgrace from which we have just now but narrowly escaped, make me feel that the life you saved is becoming a burden. Something like this I have felt before today, but never so keenly."

"Spoken like a book, upon my word! But if you are so down in the mouth, I wonder what I must be."

"I don't think the comparison is quite fair," said Lionel, after a slight pause, and a gulp rather than a sip of his neglected brandy and water.

"Not fair, I suppose, because I am the naughty boy of the story, and have brought all my troubles on myself," exclaimed Rawlins, in a tone that implied something like reproach, while it appealed for commiseration.

"You have said it. But, if I think you the naughty

boy of the story, God knows I do not consider myself the good one."

"Well," returned Rawlins, "I should have said you were, and the very prince of good fellows too, up to the last month or two."

"Do not let us bandy words. All the facts are mutually known to us. I have been generous, but with money that was not my own; and what were mine—time, intellect, energy—I have wasted. But this last mad plunge at the gaming-table has been the *coup* which, I suppose, was needed to bring me to my senses."

"Well, I did not suppose I had such a perfect innocent to deal with. If you had but held your tongue, and looked unconscious, my winnings would have paid off all old scores, and set us up again in the world."

"Winnings you would have called them!"

"Yes, winnings, for I held the winning card. Why, even if it had been a changeling, as they wanted to prove, it would only have been the joke of a sleight of hand, such as you and I have suffered from, in all seriousness, more than once."

"Cuthbert, Cuthbert!" exclaimed Lionel, passing his fingers through his hair, and then clasping his hands together at the back of his head. "Cuthbert, is it you or I that is going mad?"

"Neither, I hope; though I am about as hard up as ever a fellow was. But I suppose I shall fall upon my feet again, some day. It is very well for you who have been brought up to a profession, and with notions of work, to be so mighty particular. But I believed myself heir to a fine property till last year, when my old uncle thought proper to marry again, and now I am cut out by the birth of a son. But you'll see; I've still my mother's allowance, and the family must get me into something or other, and I shall pay all my debts if I live long enough. First and foremost, I shall endeavor to pay you."

"Thank you," replied Lionel curtly, and with all graciousness extracted by his tone from those naturally gracious words. Then, after a moment's pause, he added:

"I shall go to bed now; you can sit up as long as you like. Burton will show you to your room. I don't know where they are going to put you "Good-night."

"Good-night," returned the guest, but without rising from his chair. Nor did the young men shake hands.

Presently, Burton came in, and busied herself with clearing away the supper things. She knew that this was the gentleman who had jumped into the water and saved Mr. Lionel from drowning, and she had a distinct recollection of him at the juvenile Christmas party, when he whirled with Phœbe in the *valse à deuxtemp*, and the servants looked on admiringly from the doorway; and she did think it a little odd of Mr. Lionel to have left him in this unceremonious manner. Doubtless, these reflections added to the keenness of her scrutiny as from time to time she looked at the guest, who was now leaning back moodily in an easy chair, which he had turned round to the fire.

Burton had several times in her life made capital out of very dirty work—as gold diggers of many sorts do—and it was one of her habits, which had become second nature, to suspect a secret or a mystery from the faintest of indications, while, from much practice, she was singularly skilful in the tentative process called "feeling the way."

"It is a cold evening, sir," said Burton, as she filled a tray with glasses and plates; "shall I light a fire in your room?"

"No, I think not, thank you; I will not give you so much trouble."

"No trouble, sir, I assure you," said Burton. "I had better light it, if you do not object."

"Oh, I do not object, only, really it is not necessary;" but, while thus acknowledging the civility of the woman, he looked up, and their eyes met. There is sometimes a sort

of freemasonry established by a look, and it was so in this instance. The two felt that they might be of use to each other.

"It *is* cold," continued Rawlins, by way of encouraging conversation; "but I see you understand making up a fire, and this room is deliciously warm."

"Well, sir, I have kept up a good fire all day for the sake of the furniture and the pictures; things do so spoil with even a touch of damp. I don't know, sir, whether you have noticed the new pictures—them that have been painted since you were here in the winter."

"No, indeed, I have not observed them particularly, but I suppose you mean the portraits of the young gentlemen that I see."

"Yes," returned Burton, "and of the young ladies too, only they are out together; it is what you call a fancy picture."

"I must get up and look at them," said Rawlins.

"I'll turn the gas on a little more," cried Burton, doing so as she spoke, and thoroughly illuminating the room.

That summer the young Freeths had sat to a rising artist, who had produced lifelike portraits of Gilbert and little Teddy, and had grouped Phœbe and Jane together, costuming them in flowing drapery, which bore no stamp of a fleeting fashion. Thus did the painter hope the better to preserve the aspect and reality of youthfulness in his creation. Jane had a rose-bud in her hand, as if just gathered, and Phœbe a book half opened. It was really a pretty picture; though, as the likenesses were excellent, it scarcely deserved the term Burton had applied to it.

"You remember the young ladies, of course," said the woman. "Opinions differ, but I think Miss Phœbe is the beauty of the family."

"She is very pretty, certainly," said Rawlins. "I remember her well enough to know what a good likeness this is."

"And most likely she'll be the fortune of the family, too."

"Fortune!" exclaimed Rawlins, in real surprise.

"Yes, sir, don't you know? Miss Phœbe's godmother do dote upon her. And she is a lady of property, with nothing but cats and dogs that may be said to belong to her. In fact, I was as good as told by her own maid that Miss Phœbe was to have everything."

"And is the godmother an old lady?" said Rawlins.

"Middling old; a good bit over sixty, and getting very frail; a regular church-yard cough that she has."

"Poor old lady! Does she live in London through all these fogs?" asked Cuthbert.

"Yes; she's mighty fond of her own home in Bloomsbury square; and," Burton added, "she gets good rooms cheap there; but if she saves, it is my belief it is mostly for Miss Phœbe's sake."

"Well," said Rawlins, "you have given me quite a little history. But a church-yard cough and Bloomsbury square are a most gloomy conjunction,—one needs the idea of a pretty little heiress to restore cheerfulness."

"I am glad you think Miss Phœbe pretty."

"Upon my word I do. In my opinion, she was the prettiest girl at the children's party last Christmas."

"Ah, and she's prettier now. But I beg pardon, sir, for talking in this way. Is there anything more you wish for tonight?"

"Nothing at all, I thank you."

"And what time would you like to be called, sir?"

"What is the usual breakfast hour?"

"Nine o'clock in the winter, when the family are at home; but I am sure, sir, you can breakfast at what hour you like."

"Oh, nine o'clock will suit me exactly; but I am very tired, and may oversleep myself, so shall be glad if somebody will knock at my door in good time."

Now, it chanced that Lionel Freeth, also tired and jaded in mind and body, was the lazy one next morning. But he sent a message downstairs, entreating Mr. Rawlins not to wait breakfast. And the aroma of the hot coffee was so pleasant, and the appearance of some dainty cutlets so appetizing, that the guest had no temptation to demur. There were now other servants in attendance, but Burton came across the visitor in the course of the morning, and a little further tittle-tattle was then indulged in.

Without a compromising word having been spoken between them, Burton understood that Cuthbert Rawlins was well inclined to make up to the "fortune of the family;" and he comprehended that there was a keen-eyed tool ready for his use, provided he should need it—and could pay for it—a tool that might help to cut through obstacles and smooth down difficulties.

Lionel and his guest were that day very little together until dinner time, by which period the young host had arrived at a decision. Cuthbert's society had become intolerable to him, yet he could not refuse the shelter of his father's roof to the man who had saved his life. He could, however, leave him to his own devices, and, after dinner, Lionel announced his intention of going the next morning to Shinglebeach to see Mrs. Brindley and his sisters, whence he should probably proceed straight to Cambridge in readiness for the Michaelmas term. With a cold courtesy, he begged Cuthbert to make himself at home at Telford House for the few days which he had said it would be a convenience for him to remain in London.

In reality, it was of vital importance that the visitor should remain where he was for half a week longer,—should date certain letters he desired to write from a creditable address, and should have time to arrange plans for the future. When he took his departure, the following week, he presented a pair of gold sleeve-links to Burton as a *souvenir*, or retainer.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ON THE BEACH.

BY one of the caprices of the English climate, a foretaste of winter had been followed by a return of pleasant autumn weather; so that when Lionel Freeth reached Shinglebeach, he found himself beneath a sky which—by way of distinction from Southern skies—might be called of British blue. True, it was abundantly flecked by fleecy clouds, which piled themselves about the horizon, and reflected the calm radiance of the equinoctial sunset. But the air was calm, and the tide rose lazily, as if the flat waves were weary of strife, and were garnering their remaining strength.

The contrast presented by the Shinglebeach of today to the London of yesterday was no inappropriate type of the relief Lionel felt at having broken away from the companionship of the last several weeks. Certainly, there are persons very far from highly-gifted, who exercise a powerful personal influence whenever—as it would seem—they choose to exert it. Very often such people are far inferior in mental calibre to the friends or relatives whom, for a time, they absolutely rule; and, all the while, this is a fact tacitly understood, if not openly acknowledged, between the parties. I do not think that Cuthbert Rawlins, in his wildest mood of self-adulation—and such moods were not uncommon with him—would have placed himself intellectually on a par with Lionel Freeth; but he had a trick of making a merit of his own deficiencies, which had something in it that was infectious. He would speak with a

semi-lament of his own incorrigible idleness till the listener was half persuaded that a state of graceful indolence was rather a praiseworthy condition, receptive of the best influences, and to be coveted rather than despised, as one teeming with happy consequences. He would tell of his own follies and extravagances till they seemed on the one hand the promptings of ultra generosity and refinement; on the other, sharp lessons which had struck home like arrows to the mark. There was a caressing cadence in his voice that bewitched women, and did not fall wholly without effect even on men whom he sought to charm; but to permanently succeed in the world, insincere people need a vigilance which is superhuman. The fatal hour always strikes when they are unmasked, and it may be even judged too severely. There is no recoil like the recoil from love to hate, from trust to suspicion; and this was the sort of recoil which had taken place in Lionel's mind toward the college friend who had saved his life only a year ago.

Though an unexpected visitor, Lionel was, of course, cordially and enthusiastically welcomed by the little party of which Mrs. Brindley was the presiding spirit. The loving glee of his sisters at seeing him, the boisterous delight of Gilbert, and the childish pleasure of little Teddy, were something wholesome and refreshing that braced up his moral nature, while they brought the tears almost to his eyes. Almost, not quite, for Lionel had the Englishman's power of driving back such evidences of emotion.

Mrs. Brindley herself was delightfully affable, and improvised half a dozen plans and projects for passing the time, and enjoying the pleasant weather to the utmost. They had but another week to remain at Shinglebeach, she observed, and must live out of doors if possible.

A week! What a little speck of time it is, and how often passed in a calm monotony that leaves but the faintest records behind. And yet events that make turning points in a career—meetings and partings that are the

landmarks of a life's chart—may all happen in one little week—nay, in one short day—and be the shaping force of a long future. Whispered words may be spoken in a minute, that shall have reverberating echoes to the soul while memory holds its power; words that are no promise, and yet bind more subtly than a vow; thoughts may be thought that burn themselves into the fibre of being, and become integral with it; and looks may ratify a compact that no earthly powers and potentates can annul.

Mrs. Brindley had not the slightest objection to her daughter and Lionel being thrown together in the unrestrained intercourse of sea-side life; and when two young people are very much inclined to each other's society, and the chaperon systematically refrains from interference, it is surprising to note the number of opportunities for a *tête-à-tête* which seem spontaneously to arise. Indeed, Lionel felt himself lucky on more than one occasion. When the whole party were half way down the pier, Mrs. Brindley sometimes remembered some special mission in the town, and sent back the young Freeths to execute it; but, anxious about their doings, she would shortly follow them, not, however, without recommending Lionel and Aline by all means to continue their walk.

Or the breeze was too keen for Phœbe and Jane; though it had just the degree of briny roughness which benefited the slender, delicate Aline so much. Certainly, this last week that lovely tint, the pink of the sea-shell, or of a rose leaf, deepening sometimes to the fuller flush of the ripened peach, was very frequent on Aline's fair cheek. Altogether, there was a radiance about her that heightened every personal advantage she had, and, at her worst, Aline could hardly be called other than a pretty girl. But hers was a mobile face, about which there were different opinions.

One day, Lionel and Aline had strolled away from their party to the extreme end of the little town. Hereabout a

row of unfinished houses abutted upon the rising downs, and the shore, gently curving, formed a little cove, where only at exceptionally high tides did the sea come up to the cliff. Consequently, there was a pleasant space where the beach was dry, and where some large boulders made really convenient seats.

"After our long walk you must rest," said Lionel; "I am sure you are tired."

"Only a little tired, not very," replied Aline; "five minutes of rest will be quite enough for me."

So saying, Aline descended the wooden steps which led to the beach, and had selected a great boulder with a wall of cliff at its back, while the dry pebbles were still craunching beneath Lionel's feet. Not till she was fairly seated did Aline perceive what a really secluded nook she had chosen; and then some maiden consciousness of a mistake heightened her color. She hastily unfurled her parasol, though really the sunshine was not oppressive, exclaiming as she did so:

"Indeed, I shall be rested in a minute; I assure you I am not tired."

"Oh, but I am; tired of so many things!" exclaimed Lionel, with a sigh. "And you said five minutes, and I am going to ask for ten. I want to tell you a story while—while we rest."

"A story? Oh, that will be delightful; but do you really like being here? You know the esplanade seat is not far off."

"Do not stir, I beseech you," said Lionel, lightly touching her arm. "This is the very spot in which I tell my story, and to lie at your feet while I do so, is all that I ask."

So saying, he threw himself upon the shingle, and leaning his head upon his elbow, contrived to bring his face beneath the shadow of Aline's large sun-shade parasol. It was one of those calm September days when every sound of

nature—the trill of a bird, the hum of an insect, the rustle of a leaf—seems a still small voice that speaks to the soul; and notably was it a day on which, to the receptive mind, the sea comes charged with messages, and is the diapason that includes those other voices, and attunes the heart to mystic thoughts and subtle fancies.

There was a momentary pause, while Aline and Lionel gazed at the "crawling" waves as they came up gently to cast their silvery fringe upon the shore. No human creature was in sight, though a few fishermen's crafts were just visible, and the smoke of distant steamers trailed along the horizon. It was privacy without desolation.

"In three days I must be at Cambridge," exclaimed Lionel, "and I may not have a better opportunity than this for telling my story."

"I am listening,—pray begin," said Aline, with a sort of mock gravity.

"Once upon a time there lived a young man,—"

"A prince, at least," interrupted Aline, the mock gravity rippling into a smile; "a prince, at least, if the story has that fairy-tale-like beginning."

"A prince! Ah, I wish the hero were a prince!" returned Lionel, without, at the moment, proceeding with his narrative.

"If he is not a prince," continued Aline, "I beg of you to begin his story some other way. 'Once upon a time' is a sort of trumpet tune that always calls me straight away into fairy-land; and I confess that I delight in the fine company I meet there."

"Ah," sighed Lionel, "I am afraid that fine company makes you intolerant of meaner folks,—poor faulty mortals."

"That is a severe little speech, but perhaps I deserve it."

"I did not mean it for severity, and had no thought of censure. How unhappy I am to have so blundered."

"I repeat that I deserved a rebuke," said Aline, trying hard to keep up a tone of *badinage*, not very natural to her; "but I must say that you are quite a stranger to fairy-land if you think faulty mortals do not abound there. To be sure, the fine company in which I so delight are the faulty people made wise and good by the 'uses of adversity,' adversity being often the instrument chosen by beneficent fairies to bring about the happiest changes."

"Then you do believe in faulty people being made wise and good," cried Lionel, drawing himself a little nearer to Aline, and venturing to twine his fingers in the fringe of her shawl.

"Of course I do! The loveliness of fairy-land consists in punishment not being in vain; in faulty people being shown their errors, and worthy people being certainly rewarded, and all things coming right at last."

"Then, if you were queen of the fairies, you would not drive the evil doers to despair?" asked Lionel.

"Certainly not; they should be happy directly they became good."

"But could they be quite happy, seeing the consequences of their evil?"

"Oh, in fairy-land, consequences are altered at a fairy's will," answered Aline merrily.

"And that is the sad difference between real life and fairy life," said Lionel with a sigh; "in real life we cannot escape the consequences of evil. As some poet says,—

'A deed can never die.'"

"Yes; but even in real life the less evil we do the less bad consequences must result. So the better people are, the happier they ought to be; of that I am quite sure."

"And you think it is 'never too late to mend?'" rejoined Lionel.

"There is always some truth in a popular proverb; but,"

she continued, "I am waiting for your story; only, unless it is something very beautiful, and that happened so long ago that one don't know and don't care whether it is true or not, pray don't begin with 'Once upon a time.'"

"I am afraid it is not a beautiful story, and I do want you to know and care that it is true; so suppose I begin, 'Lately there was a young man—'"

"Yes, that will do."

"A young Englishman, who committed a great many follies, wasted time and opportunities, threw himself back in the race of life, got entangled in the coils and meshes of debt, sipped at that intoxicating draught called pleasure; in short, took a wrong turning on the way, and did not perceive that he was on the road to ruin till a sharp jolt awakened him to the reality of things."

Lionel paused, and Aline said gently:

"And what did he do then?"

"He struggled, to the best of his ability, desperately and at some cost, out of the bad road; but he is torn by remorse, and bruised and wounded in spirit. Yet, withal, he is so unreasonable that he wants to be happy; wants to enjoy high fortune as if he had deserved it, and wants to be secure of the love he is not worthy to seek. Ah, Aline, tell me that you pity him!"

Aline's face crimsoned, but she did not speak.

"Say that you pity him," repeated Lionel.

"I do," she replied, in a low voice.

"And," cried Lionel, "when his foot is firmly planted in the right path; when energy and will have made up for lost time, could you love him, Aline, and forgive his faults and his follies? Speak, Aline, tell me."

"In fairy-land it would be the right thing to do," she murmured.

"And I am sure you think the code of fairy-land perfection."

"That is true,—for fairy-land."

"And should not mortals imitate what they so much admire?"

"Ah, if one could always do that."

"Try, in pity, try! Ah, Aline," continued Lionel, "my punishment is that I must speak in allegories. I dare not otherwise."

Now, when loiterers on the sea-shore indulge in an interesting conversation, they are very apt to be unobservant of the advancing waves; and so it was on the present occasion. There is no telling what more definite turn the discourse might have taken, notwithstanding Lionel's "I dare not," had not a wave, larger and rougher than its predecessors, dashed its spray almost in their faces. There was a hurried move, of course, and Lionel helped Aline to step across some dry boulders, and in doing so held her hand with a firmness of grasp which she did not resent.

No verbal promise was asked or made, and yet there was faith and trust between them, and the hours which remained for Lionel at Shinglebeach gave to the homely little place Eden aspects.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE BRINK OF THE PRECIPICE.

"AND tell dear mamma that there is not the least occasion for her to hurry home," said Mrs. Brindley, addressing Phœbe Freeth, whose pen had for a moment ceased its rapid movement; "that everything is going on satisfactorily in town, and that, in fact, we are quite a happy family. That is, my dear," she continued, "if you think so; of course, I can only answer for myself and Aline."

"Oh, Mrs. Brindley," replied Phœbe, "I am sure we have all been as happy as possible with you. Though I should not much wonder if Miss Otway, when she comes back, declares you have spoilt us. But I like being spoilt, as mamma knows very well. And I am sure this long letter will show her how much enjoyment we have had. I think we stayed just the right time at Shinglebeach; another week, and we might have grown a little tired of it."

"Well, I was a little sorry to leave the sea," said Jane. "I fancy it would have taken several more weeks to tire me of it."

"That is, Jenny, because you are such a slow-coach," said Phœbe, with a touch of disdain in her voice. "We all know that if you have only a piano to fly to when you like, and plenty of books to skim, you are quite contented; not to mention your love of paddling in the wet after nasty sea-weed, and making a mess of yourself in drying it afterward."

"At any rate, I have brought home a nice little collection," returned Jane with a smile; "and I am sure the tastes you mention are very innocent."

"Oh, yes, they are innocent enough," said the elder sister with the characteristic toss of the head, which from habit she retained, though she had latterly straightened out her curls, and adopted a more womanly style of *coiffure*. "Now, Mrs. Brindley," she continued, "what else is there to mention? I have told mamma that as Catherine so much wishes her to stay a little longer at Five Oaks, we all think it would be the greatest pity for her to come home just yet. Also, that as it must be holiday till Miss Otway returns, you are taking us to the Crystal Palace and the National Gallery, and improving our minds in that very agreeable manner."

"What a rattlebrain you are growing, Phœbe," cried Mrs. Brindley, with something of admiration implied in the censure.

"I suppose that is the natural result of being just seventeen, and having had a lovely birthday present. I have told mamma what a beautiful emerald ring godmamma sent me. I don't mind its being old-fashioned, because it is so good; and, besides, I can have it reset some day or other."

"I would never have it altered if I were you," observed Jane.

"Why not?"

"Because I am sure it was meant for a keepsake, and one don't like to alter keepsakes."

"Oh, that I call a nonsensical idea,—or, as Gilbert would say, bosh. Now, I have told mamma all the news I can think of, even to Mr. Rawlins calling to inquire after his letters, and condescending to stay to dinner, and spend the evening with us."

If Phœbe Freeth had lived a generation or two sooner, in the days when letters were comparatively few, and it

was thought a social duty to make them worth their postage, she would probably have been valued as a correspondent. She loved novelty, and the surface gossip of society; was egotist enough to consider her own doings must be interesting to her intimates, and had none of that keen sympathy with the feelings of others which, in its dread of giving pain, so often arrests the pen. Penny prepaid postage notwithstanding, she did in her heart pique herself a little on her epistolary powers; and liking to do that which she thought she did well, she cultivated a small neat handwriting, so that she compressed quite a budget in a couple of sheets of note-paper. Really, her letter was an amusement at the breakfast-table at Five Oaks the next morning, and something of a help to Catherine's persuasions that her mother should still further prolong her visit. And so she did, for nearly another month.

And meanwhile Mrs. Brindley was mistress at Telford House, and took care that all the domestic affairs should be in charming order against Mrs. Freeth's return. During those memorable weeks, Cuthbert Rawlins often called, ostensibly to inquire after letters which he said Lionel had permitted him to have directed there; but latterly these visits had been in the evening, and on each occasion he fell more and more into the manner of an *habitué* of the house.

Mrs. Brindley liked society, especially gentlemen's society; and this was the dull season in London. Therefore, the occasional "dropping in" of a young man with the manners of the well-bred world, and who had always plenty of ready conversation, was very pleasant to her. In her doting fondness for her daughter, she thought, too, that he admired Aline; and though she had a liking for Lionel Freeth, and a strong belief that some day he would be a capital match, she saw no objection to her daughter receiving a little harmless homage from another "eligible," which she presumed Mr. Rawlins to be. But it was not to

Aline that he addressed half-whispered phrases that implied admiration; not her glance which he sought to meet from across the room; not her hand that he ventured to hold with a lingering pressure, and twice to raise to his lips when no one saw.

On Phœbe's side it was the old, old story of intoxicated vanity thirsting for more and more gratification, and the awakening of youth's passionate yearnings. The two emotions were like propelling oars to her little life-bark; something which she miscalled love deposed the weak conscience at the helm, and she refused to look at the rapids she was nearing.

One evening, Burton was especially assiduous in her attentions to Phœbe, lingering over the hair arranging as if quite delighting in her task.

"There," said the young girl, growing a little tired of the operation, "I am sure that will do."

"I suppose it ought to, miss," replied the woman; "but really your hair is so thick and so beautiful, that I could stand over it half the night."

"Oh, Burton, what a flatterer you are!" returned Phœbe, but by no means in a tone of displeasure.

"It is no flattery, Miss Phœbe,—why should it be? And if I might be so bold as to tell, I know somebody who thinks just as I do."

"Burton, what is it you mean?" asked Phœbe, blushing to the very roots of the praised hair.

"Will you be sure not to get me into trouble by mentioning it if I tell? You see, miss, it would be different if your mamma were at home; then I might think it right to tell her; but I don't think I have any call to talk about things to Mrs. Brindley."

"Certainly not; but what is it you have got to tell me? I promise not to repeat it."

"Well, miss, there is a gentleman, who shall be nameless, who said he'd give me—well, I won't say what—if I

would steal a lock of your beautiful hair for him. He thought I could do it without your knowledge; but I wouldn't, miss, be guilty of such a thing. As I told him, he ought to have asked you himself, open and candid; but he said he hadn't the courage."

"Who was it, Burton? Do tell me."

"Oh, miss, you must know."

"How can I know?" said Phœbe, who wanted the truth explicitly stated.

"Well, to be sure, there must have been a many gentlemen admire you; and so, perhaps, you cannot be positive without I tell you. It was Mr. Rawlins."

"Mr. Rawlins! Why, when did you see him?" cried Phœbe, with prompt and eager curiosity,—not displeasure.

It has been said that liars should have good memories; surely, for success in their undertakings, they need also the most absolute presence of mind. This circumstantial narrative about the lock of hair was a pure invention; but Burton had no fear of exposure. Cuthbert Rawlins was more in her power than she ever meant to be in his, and, she was assured, would mightily approve of all she had done. There was an understanding between them, that she was to assist him in ingratiating himself with Phœbe by every means which presented itself; thus she had only carried out his wishes by this plausible story, and when Phœbe put the sudden question, "When did you see him?" Burton was still equal to the occasion, though it involved more invention. She took such morsels of truth as served her purpose, added the necessary "embroidery," and entirely suppressed the fact of Mr. Rawlins and herself having arranged periodical interviews.

"I met him coming out of church on Sunday," she said, "and he spoke to me to inquire after the family; and then he was going the same way, and he went on talking about you, and wanted me to be his friend. There, miss, now you know; but you won't tell on me, will you?"

"No, no; I won't tell; but I wonder Mr. Rawlins knew you," observed Phœbe.

"La, miss, you forget that he was here best part of a week, when I nearly always waited upon him."

"To be sure; I did forget that."

"And, miss, may I cut off a piece of your hair?"

"Certainly not, Burton," replied the young girl, but with a pleased smile on her face. "I could not think of such a thing as sending Mr. Rawlins a lock of my hair. But you did quite right to tell me,—one ought always to know of such things; and indeed I feel quite obliged to you. You need not be afraid of my telling; I am not a child now. There, good night, I am sure you must be tired standing over me for such a time."

Not a child! She had said it. That night, when, for the first time, she was conscious of a secret and a mystery, when her drugged conscience slept, and so allowed her to feel a pride in much that ought to have been a shame,—that night she laid down the innocence of childhood, with all its bright light-heartedness.

Before Mrs. Freeth returned to London, a system of clandestine correspondence between Cuthbert Rawlins and Phœbe had been established through Burton's agency; and, oh, the pity of it!—the young girl fancied herself a heroine of romance, instead of an adept learning quickly and cleverly lessons of deception and intrigue. The unprincipled waiting-maid was her confidante, and she made no other, Rawlins easily persuading her to secrecy on the plea of his present unsettled position. There were passionate "love letters," and a few stolen interviews, during the ensuing weeks; and though, when Rawlins entered on his course of surreptitious wooing, he had not intended exactly to compromise himself, he found, before long, that his own selfish inclinations were decidedly engaged. He was a clever, handsome scoundrel, but yet a human being; and though he began with hypocrisy, he ended by liking

Phœbe Freeth better than any other girl in the world. She was handsome and clever, and her faults had nothing in them to repel him.

In the course of the winter the ailing godmother died; and the expectations in reference to Phœbe's inheritance were amply fulfilled. The will had been made within the last year or two. When Phœbe Freeth came of age, she would be mistress of about twelve thousand pounds; meanwhile, the testatrix desired that she should, at the age of eighteen, have the control of the interest of the money, and come into possession of certain valuables, notably plate, jewellery, and point lace.

No wonder that Hester Otway found a girl burdened with a love secret, an unsteady pupil. And when the godmother died, studies were still more neglected. By not very slow degrees, Phœbe emancipated herself from the school-room, though she still took music and drawing lessons, and played at reading history. If her gradual but very decided assumption of independence was a little mourned over by her mother and Hester, it was laid entirely to the account of her legacy. Consequently, the little "talking at," which, it must be admitted, did occasionally take place, was all directed to abate "purse pride" and its kindred offences. Bees, I believe, can extract honey from even unwholesome flowers. Poor Phœbe, in a manner, reversed the process. From every little lecture she received she drew excuses for her own secret conduct. Did she not know in her heart that she was *not* worldly? that she was going to be grandly generous and magnanimous with her money? To be sure, not exactly in the manner her parents and governess would approve; for already Cuthbert Rawlins was spoken of in the family with sorrow, and the "cold shoulder" turned toward him. The story of his grave misdoings had oozed out, and even Lionel could not defend him. But with a girl whose character was strongly veined with morbid sentimentality,

who had always had a certain lawlessness in her nature which lent attraction to forbidden things, and who was under the dominion of "first love," what she called his misfortunes only riveted her attachment.

Of course, Cuthbert gave Phœbe his own version of his extravagances, his debts, his gambling; classing all such affairs under the head of "follies." And of course he persuaded her that it was love for her which had awakened him to better things, and would inevitably keep him in the right path henceforth and for evermore. Perhaps there is always a sameness in the wooing of men of his class; protestations of this kind are so common, that they might be stereotyped as a warning to girls. I wonder at what age a woman must have arrived, or through what sorrows she must have passed, before she feels the full force of Lovelace's lines:

> "I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Loved I not honor more!"

With her conscience warped and blinded, Phœbe Freeth's mental and moral nature were growing all awry. She moved beneath a network of deception, which became day by day more entangling; and, young as she was, even her beauty suffered. An indefinable expression came into her face; a look not wholly of cunning, not wholly of fixed determination, not wholly of watchfulness and caution, but a something made up of these attributes blended and moulded,—a look that gives age to any face, but one that happily is not often found marring the bloom of "sweet seventeen."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A TRUE FRIEND.

THE shortest days were over; Parliament had met, and the London season was beginning. Contact with society had a little reconciled Mrs. Freeth to the "station in life" to which she appeared to have been called. She was less shy and fearful now than she had been a year or two ago; but still she did not take very kindly to the part her husband would have liked her to play. She was essentially the "house-mother" as well as the "housewife," with deep affections compressed into narrow channels, and with the lines of her character too firmly fixed for any change, beyond that of development in the same direction, to take place. If she visited with more ease and cheerfulness than she did in the early days of Hubert Freeth's prosperity, the motive power was still to please her husband or advance her children. She had not the restlessness and love of excitement which are almost necessary to make the woman of society, in the present day, enjoy her life.

Mr. Freeth had returned from the Continent with important work cut out. He was busier than ever,—too busy to give much heed to trifling affairs, however closely they concerned him. Only he stipulated for certain periodical hospitalities, at which, of course, he entertained his own set.

Reuben Appersley had talked of taking a house in town for the season; but Mr. and Mrs. Freeth had overruled the plan, pleading to have Catherine's society under

their own roof, and urging, what was the truth, that Telford House was large enough for them all.

Reuben was now essentially a busy man. Though not a speaker in the House, he was seldom absent from his place, and was already recognized by his party as a member that could be depended on. But there was a private interest which he pursued with avidity, and which took up quite as much of his time and thoughts as did his public duties. Ever since he had heard the incident of Hester's anonymous present, he had felt persuaded that George Otway was still alive; and it became a passion of his soul to track this man, believing it the only human means of clearing and vindicating his father's memory.

He spared not money; and perhaps, through his liberality, communicated some of his own energy to the "secret inquiry" people whom he employed. Certainly, now, there was some appearance of a clue having been found.

But with such several absorbing interests, there is no doubt that Catherine was a little neglected; not intentionally, not even in a manner that she felt as unkindness, for he rested on the knowledge that she was in her father's house, among those dear ones of whom, perhaps, once he had been a little jealous; so he gave himself up to his chosen tasks, content in a great measure to let his wife go her own way.

And Catherine's way was to "enjoy the good the gods provided" her. With a bright intellect athirst for occupation and satisfaction, a rapidly-developed taste for the beautiful and suggestive in the arts, and with just that degree of sensuousness without which there cannot really be refinement, good society was to her a keen pleasure. Alas! I am afraid these are the very qualities which, on the "wrong side of the tapestry," we call "restlessness and love of excitement."

Because it gave Catherine so much pleasure to linger in picture-galleries and attend concerts, Mrs. Freeth was

always ready to be her companion. She did herself enjoy music very much, but she shrank from telling how little her eyes served her. Still, Catherine was, to a great extent, aware of the pathetic helplessness her mother's failing sight occasioned, and the knowledge made her infinitely tender and watchful, and eagerly anxious to be her companion as much as possible. Of course, they visited together a great deal, and notably became quite *habitués* at Lady Hartrington's receptions.

Here they met Algernon Raybrooke, who was, in the first instance, profuse in his apologies for not having called at Telford House since his return to London; apologies Mrs. Freeth accepted in simple good faith, especially as he took an early opportunity of atoning for his fault, if fault it were. By degrees, almost imperceptibly, and yet not properly to be called slow, Mr. Raybrooke, the "idle man," became the constant escort of Catherine and her mother, the whole arrangement appearing delightful to every one concerned.

Algernon had the *entrée* to many studios, where he introduced his friends before the so-called private view days; and he always seemed able to secure reserved-seat tickets for attractive concerts, or good opera-boxes for exceptionally crowded nights, when it was currently reported that such things were not to be had for love or money. Then he was punctual in keeping appointments, and punctuality was a virtue Mrs. Freeth thoroughly appreciated. In unforeseen emergencies he was always full of resources; and was, altogether, so reliable as a human staff to lean on, that Mrs. Freeth grew to regard him as quite the best liked of all her new friends. It was a liking based on that semi-maternal feeling which most middle-aged women feel when brought into close intimacy with the "next generation."

She delighted to listen to him and Catherine, though often quite aware that their conversation was "over her

head." But realizing this fact only increased the pride she felt in her daughter, and helped to establish that reversal of position which latterly had taken place between them. Ever since her visit to Five Oaks, Mrs. Freeth had looked up to Catherine, for she had become vaguely conscious that there were heights and depths in her character which she had not yet sounded; and she was, perhaps, a little too apt to reverence faculties she did not comprehend.

Algernon Raybrooke was something more than polite in his civilities to Mrs. Freeth; he was thoughtful, considerate, and kind, in that quiet way which goes to the hearts of women. Her little commissions were never slurred over or forgotten, her tastes were remembered, her wishes consulted. No wonder that by degrees he grew to be one of the most intimate and frequent of guests. At least two days out of three he dropped in at luncheon, though always because he had something to tell or to plan, or there was some occasion for him to be escort to mother and daughter. Phœbe, too, though not yet exactly considered "out," was often of the party; but, unlike most girls of her age, she seemed marvellously indifferent to pleasure. A shrewd woman of the world would have been suspicious of this apathy in so young a girl; but there was a simplicity and purity about Mrs. Freeth which made her very slow to think evil of any one, and least of all of her own children.

Certainly, Algernon Raybrooke might have known that they were drifting into a manner of life very likely to render them the observed of observers; but a perilous enjoyment of the present blinded his judgment, while he relied on his own fixed determination neither by word nor deed to give the slightest occasion for the world's censure.

One day he happened to call on Lady Hartrington, and —a rare occurrence—had the good fortune to find her alone. At first they talked of passing events of the day;

but they were dear friends, this young man and old woman, and very soon the conversation turned to personal interests and pursuits. It is to be remembered that Lady Hartrington was the only person in the world who knew the secret of his heart; and though she would fain hope that his love for Catherine was a thing of the past, entirely stamped out, it was a keen sorrow to her whenever she recalled the suffering she had witnessed. She wished from her heart that Algernon would fall in love with some one else, and marry out of hand. And now there was something on her mind that she was determined to say.

"Algernon," she exclaimed, "you have sometimes jestingly called yourself my son, adopting me for your mother, and now I am going to speak to you as if the relation were real."

"Is it a scolding I deserve?" he asked, with a smile. "But believe this, that I am very grateful for the regard which prompts your words, whatever they may be."

"Yes," resumed Lady Hartrington; "I am inclined to scold you. Algernon, you pay too much attention to Mrs. Reuben Appersley. The world is beginning to stare,—its next step will be talk."

"What does it dare to stare at? What would it dare to talk about?" he exclaimed, with strong emotion, for he was bitterly stung by the words which he had seemed so willing to hear. But Lady Hartrington was too true a friend to resent his impetuosity, and she answered very calmly,—

"The world is beginning to notice that you are ever by her side,—as the phrase goes, her very shadow. The next thing will be for Mrs. Grundy to shake her head, and begin to chatter."

"I wish Mrs. Grundy could really be personified," cried Algernon, his passion no whit abated. "I would take her by her long hair, and dash out her ridiculous brains."

"And I," said Lady Hartrington, with some sadness

in her tone, "I would give her always the easy-chair by my fireside. See how we differ! I have the greatest respect for Mrs. Grundy,—the world could not do without her."

"Oh, Lady Hartrington," he exclaimed, "you cannot guess the pain you have given me."

"Yes, I can, and the knowledge is my pain. I fancy a humane surgeon, when he cuts or cauterizes, *is* sorry for the pain he inflicts."

"But you are mistaken,—altogether mistaken," returned Algernon, in some degree mastering his feelings. "I am Mrs. Appersley's loyal friend, and the friend of her family, and her husband also. Such guard and watch have I kept over myself, that I am certain no one suspects that I ever loved—her who is now a wife. Dear friend, give me some credit for conquering myself. I would die rather than be the means of tarnishing her name. The thought is horrible to me, knowing, as I do, her excellence, her spotless purity. But why, oh, why may I not have the solace of her friendship?"

"Because it is dangerous in an inordinate degree. If you cultivated platonics with half a dozen other pretty and agreeable women, the case would be different."

"Cultivate platonics with half a dozen other women! No, dear friend, I am not such a fool: My respect and regard for Mrs. Appersley are something quite exceptional."

"That is exactly what I dread the world thinking," said Lady Hartrington.

"What can the world find to say?" returned Algernon. "Mrs. Freeth plays the chaperon as much as if her daughter were still single."

"But people consider Mrs. Freeth a singularly simple-minded and unworldly woman, not very well fitted to be chaperon in worldly society."

"And it is for those very qualities I love her. I vow

to you that motherly simple-hearted woman is to me charming. You forget, dear Lady Hartrington, that I spent a week under the same roof with her last autumn, and that we have a right to consider ourselves intimate friends."

"I assure you no one objects to your attentions to Mrs. Appersley's mother."

"And there is another thing," exclaimed Raybrooke. "Young as they are, mere boy and girl, I do believe there is a *tendresse* between my brother and Jenny Freeth. If it developes much further, I shall promote it with all my heart; then, I suppose, when the Freeths are a 'family connection,' that odious Mrs. Grundy will hold her tongue."

"That is a piece of news, I confess," replied his hostess; "but sailors, you know, are proverbially fickle."

"It is a hard proverb that says so. I think, on the contrary, they are as constant as other men, with more temptations to be faithless. But sailors have leisure to think and to feel, and the lonely watches, with the stars above and the waves beneath, must elevate any character that has an element of greatness in it. Frank is a fine fellow, and I thoroughly believe that little Jenny is worthy of him."

"But she is such a child!"

"Between sixteen and seventeen, I fancy. She can afford to wait till Frank has a command. He never writes without mentioning the Freeths, and twice he has sent messages through me to the girl herself. Of course I delivered them, and marked the innocent pleasure they gave. Now, if Lieutenant Raybrooke should marry Jane Freeth, it would only be stretching the point a little if I called myself Mrs. Appersley's brother."

"And meanwhile, during the years that Frank is waiting for promotion?"

"I cannot prevent the brotherly regard."

"Oh, Algernon, do you know your heart truly when you speak thus, and trust in your own strength?"

"I think I do. I know this,—that Mrs. Appersley's esteem, friendship, companionship—call it what you will—is more to me than the love of any other woman could be—"

"Hush, hush," interrupted Lady Hartrington; "such words distress me beyond measure."

"Nay, hear me till you find some satisfaction in what I may say. Not having been able to win the only woman I ever did, could, or can love, it is not my intention to marry. Probably, if I live, by and by I shall travel a good deal; perhaps lead a life of adventure; perhaps write books, as adventurers sometimes do, trusting to Frank and his heirs to perpetuate the old family, and support the honor of the 'red hand.'"

"What! relinquish entirely your profession, and give up Parliamentary ambition?"

"Yes; I have thought it all out. In the days when it seemed that I must work at the law, I hated the thought of having to defend the evil doer; and now that I need not, indeed I will not. As for Parliament,—well, I don't think it quite holy enough for one to wish to be its St. Stephen. I'm not punning on St. Stephen's, I assure you."

"St. Stephen! What do you mean?" exclaimed Lady Hartrington.

"Oh, then you don't know that I was stoned at Fordinghill?" replied Algernon.

"Indeed I did not."

"And Appersley, the successful candidate, saved me from further violence, and took me to his own home to be nursed. Oh, he is a fine fellow in many respects."

"I did hear, incidentally, that you had been at his country place, and, under all the circumstances, it surprised me a little."

"And now, my dear lady, you have the explanation. And if any set of people want me to represent them in Parliament in the future, they must go down on their knees for it, or, at any rate, bring me in without my lifting a finger to ask them."

"Which no constituency is likely to do if you persist in burying your talents," said Lady Hartrington, with a sigh. "I am afraid," she continued, "I must hide my diminished head if all my prophecies about you are to come to naught."

"Dear, kind friend," said Algernon, taking her thin, wrinkled hand in his, and pressing it warmly before he raised it to his lips; "dear, kind friend, you have always thought too well of me, and cared for my best interests too much."

"The latter cannot be," she promptly replied; and she continued, "Oh, Algernon, do not disappoint the many friends who have loved you long and well."

Algernon shrugged his shoulders slightly, but the gesture implied pain. And, after a little pause, he said:

"What is it you would have me do?"

"Your own heart must tell you," replied Lady Hartrington; "yet, if you wish me to speak, let me advise you to begin the travels you talk about without delay."

"Well, after the season, and after Frank comes home next time, I will think about it. Meanwhile, I must let things drift."

"That phrase is my pet aversion," said Lady Hartrington.

"Then I am sorry I used it," returned her guest. "I grant," he continued, "that 'letting things drift' does often imply laziness and incompetence; but there are some people who never prosper with anything they themselves initiate."

"But I don't think you belong to that class. Take care that what you call drifting *is* drifting, and not plac-

ing a traitorous steersman at the helm. But I will say no more. I know you forgive the frankness of an old friend, who knew something of life before you were born. Now let us have the pipe of peace. Will you dine with us to-morrow?"

"Unfortunately, I am engaged. I will tell you honestly where,—at the Freeths'. It is a party of scientific old fogies. The uncle—the engineer—the great man of the family, is to be there, and the opportunity will be very desirable for enlarging my mind," he added, with laughing irony; "to hear people talk on the special subjects which they thoroughly understand is really, though, the pleasantest way I know of learning anything."

"I heartily agree with you," said his friend; "and I hope you will profit by the occasion, so as to distil some of the scientific lore for my womanly capacity when next we meet."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

UNCLE THOMAS.

THE days were past when dinner-parties were a trouble and trial to Mrs. Freeth. Indeed, they were so frequent now, that she took them very much as a matter of course, and wondered a little, when she thought of her former perplexities and over-anxious cares, at the change which had taken place in herself. To be sure, she had long since obtained well-trained servants, and everybody knows how the *diner à la Russe* lightens and brightens the duties of a hostess. Then she had observed at other houses that fish might be overdone, or the soup cold, or a sauce be spilt, and yet that the sky did not fall, or the earth open, in consequence. So she had the good sense to try and glide into the way of life her husband desired, reconciling herself to it as much as she possibly could. For all of which she deserved a great deal more credit than she ever received, seeing how hard it is for those in middle life greatly to change their habits. Of course, she was not a hostess who started conversation, or even kept it going; but when Hubert Freeth entertained his friends, he always took care to have some good talkers at his table.

The visits of the old Uncle Thomas, the great man of the family, were so few and far between, that they were always made the occasion of ceremony and festivity; and it was a select party of scientific celebrities, professors of various denominations, many of them his own old friends and associates, who had now been invited to meet him.

Some of these old fogies, as Algernon Raybrooke had irreverently called them, had wives, and some had not, so the balance of numbers was on the male side. Consequently, Algernon had not any lady on his arm in the preprandial procession, but found his place arranged between a beplumed dowager and a black-coated individual with an order at his button-hole, and half the alphabet in initial capitals belonging to his name.

He tried to feel very glad that fate had not placed him next Catherine—he did not know that she had herself arranged the cards round the table—for though he had repudiated the idea of paying her undue attention, Lady Hartrington's words had in reality sunk deep into his mind. In the hours which had intervened, he had tortured himself a good deal with self-questioning, asking his conscience—his honor—in all seriousness, whither he was drifting, and beginning to suspect that the calm enjoyment of the last few weeks might, after all, be a subtle snare. He had imagined, rather than made, several excellent resolutions. To be sure, they were too contradictory to be carried out simultaneously. One purpose was to break off the intimacy with the Freeths by slow, almost imperceptible degrees, and another to do it abruptly, by going abroad at once. A third idea was to revoke his decision about the law, and to take up his old studies again, and work at them with such fury that his mind should have no time for anything else; imitating Lionel, who, by all accounts, was rapidly making up for lost time at Cambridge. But Lionel Freeth, though by no means so fascinating a man in society as Algernon, had, perhaps, a tougher fibre of character, and a more resolute will.

Algernon tried to make himself agreeable to the dowager on his right hand, and to profit by any sapient remarks from the learned lips on his left; but the scientific people talked very little "shop," and the party fell into the pleasant grooves of lively, rather than learned, talk.

Ordinarily, Algernon would have been quite in his element; but today there was a depressing weight at his heart, which he could not shake off.

This is a mood, however, which has its compensations. Listeners in society generally observe more than talkers; and it might be that Algernon Raybrooke noticed and remembered the little events of that evening more accurately than the circumstances of many a pleasanter occasion. He had often heard the bachelor old uncle mentioned incidentally, and felt a genuine interest in a man who had made a name and a fame in the world; and as Uncle Thomas was in one of his most pleasant and genial moods the impression he produced was very favorable.

The old man was above seventy, but carried his age bravely. His hair, which was very little thinned, was so purely white that it gave to his countenance the same expression which powder would have done; so that his eyes, which had really preserved their lustre to a surprising degree, looked keenly bright beneath the strongly-marked eyebrows, which still retained their ebon hue. Above the middle height, and erect of figure, there was something decidedly commanding in his presence; and perhaps the consciousness that he had achieved so many successes in life made him accept homage with a quiet dignity. He was a proud, a very proud man, who had lived for the world, and valued its opinion immensely. And now that he had reaped fame and honors and riches, it was commonly believed that every wish of his heart must be gratified, especially as his physical frame appeared still so exceptionally robust, that years of life were probably before him; while, with his nephew's sons and daughters to supply the place of lineal descendants, there did seem little in this world left unenjoyed for the wifeless, childless old man to desire. That he had remained unmarried was so evidently by choice, that no one was inclined to pity the loneliness of his old age.

After the ladies left the dining-room, Reuben went off to the "House," and Algernon drew his chair nearer to "Uncle Thomas," and had more personal conversation with him than had been possible during dinner. The result appeared to be a mutual liking between the old man and the young one. Altogether, it was in a pleasant mood that, half an hour later, the gentlemen adjourned to the drawing-room.

Meanwhile, an addition to the party had quietly arrived. Mrs. Brindley and her daughter were sufficiently intimate with the Freeths to be treated without ceremony, and it was quite a common thing, when the number for dinner was made up, for them to come in for an hour or two in the evening, "just for a little music." They did so on this occasion, and the party of ladies in the drawing-room was also increased by the two younger girls, Phœbe and Jane, and their governess, Hester Otway.

It chanced that Mrs. Brindley, in the act of examining some photographs, was seated just opposite the drawing-room door, while Aline, standing near, was chatting with Catherine in an animated manner, when old Mr. Freeth entered the room. Algernon had preceded him by a few minutes, and was admiring his venerable, dignified appearance, when a marked change came over the old man's countenance. Perhaps no one else in the room observed it, for the sudden paleness did not last; only, when the natural color returned to the cheeks, it seemed to have brought with it some lines of age that had not been remarked before.

At first Algernon thought the old man was ill, and half rose from the sofa on which he was lounging to offer assistance; but he soon altered his opinion, and felt persuaded that some mental shock had been received. Soon afterward old Mr. Freeth was formally introduced to Mrs. Brindley and her daughter, to whom, on the occasion, he made a stately bow, but hardly attempted conversation;

and when presently he helped himself to coffee, the cup trembled in his hand. Altogether, there was a collapse; he was no longer the "old man eloquent" he had been a few minutes before.

Algernon may be pardoned for puzzling and speculating a little as to what it could have been that had happened. Nothing seemed to have occurred, and there were no strangers to the old man present except the widow and her daughter, who, indeed, because they so evidently were strangers to him, might be presumed incapable of disturbing him. Mrs. Brindley looked a shade disappointed at his curtness, for she had long wished to see the famous old uncle, and would have liked to talk with him a little. There was, however, something too discouraging in his manner for her to address him again; and yet she was interested in him, and looked at him, from time to time, with something very like a stare. And, indeed, it happened that their eyes met more than once.

Later in the evening, however, a little circumstance occurred which made sufficient impression on Algernon's mind to be remembered long afterward. Uncle Thomas was not given to "petting," but if he had a favorite in the family, it was supposed to be Jane; therefore, there was nothing strange in his beckoning to her to take a chair next him. Algernon was sitting near, listening abstractedly to Catherine's playing of a "song without words," instead of hovering about the piano to turn the leaves, as assuredly he would have done a week ago. So placed, he could not help hearing, though at first with but divided attention, the conversation between the old man and his great-niece. After a little ordinary chat, Algernon's ear caught the remark:

"I did not quite catch that lady's name. Will you tell me who she is?"

"Mrs. Brindley," replied Jane. "I wonder, uncle," she continued, "that you have never seen her before. She is

quite an intimate friend. Indeed, Phœbe calls her 'Mamma Brindley' sometimes."

"Really! But I think I have heard your father mention the name, though I never chanced to meet the lady till now. You know I do not go to evening parties; and when I have dined here before, there have seldom been ladies. This gayety is quite an exception."

"Oh, uncle, I wish you came oftener, so as to know all our friends," replied Jane, with a genuine sincerity in her tone, to which the undemonstrative old man was not quite insensible.

"Are you sure I should like to know them all?" he said, with a smile.

"But you need only know well those you liked best. Why, even I can't like everybody."

"I am glad to hear it. But to return to your friend Mrs. Brindley. Did you ever happen to hear what her maiden name was?"

"I think I have seen it in an old music-book," replied the girl, "though I forget it just now. I fancy it begins with a K. But I do believe the old book I am thinking of is here. There is a quantity of Aline's music mixed up with ours. I'll go and look."

Now, Algernon perfectly remembered the old music-book to which Jenny alluded, and had noticed the name, Susan Karvil, written therein more than once. He felt interested enough to be glad that it was forthcoming, as he saw Jane carrying it across the room.

Perhaps few inanimate objects are so potent in recalling the past as an old music-book, where, without system or much order, ballads which have had their day, and dance music no less obsolete, are bound up with a few classical compositions of perennial freshness, for the sake of which, perhaps, the whole book has been allowed a prolonged lease of existence.

The old man laid the book across his knees, and took

up the cue which Catherine—now risen from the piano—innocently gave, that he was looking out something he wished played. So he turned over the yellowed leaves of "She wore a Wreath of Roses," "Oh, no, we never mention her," and half a dozen other songs of the same class; old sets of quadrilles, and early waltzes of Strauss, till he stopped at "Rousseau's Dream," which he asked Catherine to play. He had ascertained all he wanted to know; and passing comments on the old music almost chased away the recollection from Jane's mind of why the book had been sought.

"Aline Brindley sings old ballads so well," said Jane, continuing the conversation begun. "Do you know 'Auld Robin Grey,' uncle? and would you like me to ask her to sing it?"

"As you like, my dear. Your young friend seems a very charming young lady."

"She is, indeed; and don't you think her very pretty?"

"Very."

"I am so glad you think so," replied Jane with glee, "because opinions differ. Now, I admire her so much, that it pleases me to think I am right. She seems to me so perfectly unlike other people—so much handsomer, to my taste, than any one I ever saw—that I don't even compare her with other people. Did you, uncle, ever see any one at all like her?"

"Not for many a long year."

"She is not in the least like Mrs. Brindley, is she?"

"Not in the least."

And then the accidents of the evening broke off the little *tête-à-tête*. But Aline sang "Auld Robin Grey," soon after which Uncle Thomas inquired if his carriage had arrived; and being answered in the affirmative, pleaded that he had been up late for many nights, and was the first to take leave.

But when the old man reached his home, he did not at once seek rest. He ordered lights in his study, but told his servants not to sit up. Then he opened a drawer which had not been unlocked for years, and took from it a sealed packet some eight inches square. His fingers broke the seals, but with unsteady touch, and then rested on a dark morocco case. Not for more than a quarter of a century had he touched the spring by which it opened, but he pressed it now without pause or flinching. When the lid flew open, it revealed a fine painting on ivory, the half-length portrait of a very lovely woman; but it looked like Aline Brindley herself, costumed in a by-gone fashion!

When Thomas Freeth had last looked at that miniature, he had needed no assisting glass to reveal its delicate traceries, and at first he thought the image blurred and faded. But peering at it again through his double eye-glass, he saw how little time had touched it.

"Yes," he murmured to himself, "yes, the granddaughter is her very self, returned to youthful bloom and beauty; while the daughter is as much the image of the cruel, tyrant husband."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A MATRIMONIAL TÊTE-À-TÊTE.

"AND how did the evening go off after I left?" said Reuben Appersley, as he was taking his solitary breakfast an hour or two later than the rest of the family —Catherine, however, presiding to minister to his wants.

"Oh, the girls sang, and I played, and we all talked; I don't know that there is anything else to tell," replied Catherine, "except that we were not late, for uncle broke up the party by leaving early, and the remaining guests soon followed."

"Quite right too," cried Reuben, with emphasis; "the late hours of London life are perfectly killing, and every one who sets a better example is a public benefactor. I only wish I could—very soon I would."

"I have often wondered, dear Reuben, that you bear the change of habits so well," replied his wife.

"But I hate it none the less," he continued; "one must have sleep; but these morning slumbers make me ashamed of myself. Here am I breakfasting at eleven o'clock,—why, at Five Oaks I should have been up for hours, and very likely had a seven miles' ride by this time;" and as he spoke, Reuben cracked an egg with such unnecessary violence, that half of it was wasted.

"I think," said Catherine with a smile, "I think we have all been working desperately hard this London season; we women at what is called pleasure, and you and papa at business, and I think we are all growing pale and thin, and a trifle cross, in consequence."

"Nay, Kate, I have not found you cross, whatever other people may have been," replied Reuben, with a hearty, loving warmth, which went straight to her heart; and he continued, "but I did think you looking far from well yesterday,—perhaps you were tired, for you look better this morning."

"Oh, I feel pretty well," replied his wife.

"Still, you are thinner," said Reuben, "and I should like to see a little more pink in your cheeks. Now, do get back the roses, Kitty, before the Drawing-room day; for, as we have been persuaded into this assumption of dignity, I should like you to look your best, when you are presented."

"I almost wish I had not allowed myself to be presented," returned Catherine. "The dear Queen has not a more loyal and loving subject than I am, and there is not a hand in the world I should so much like to kiss as hers. Yet, for all that, I feel, in 'going to Court,' a little like only a half-welcome guest. Royalty must be infinitely bored by the press and push of people desiring to be 'received,'—people of a class that, a few years ago—from all I hear —would never have dreamed of seeking such a distinction."

"At any rate," said her husband, "as your father's daughter and my wife, *you* have every right to the honor."

"Well, in that sense, certainly. And now that it is all arranged with friends, and my dress ordered, I must go through with it; but I shall feel very lonely. At the same time, I think mamma was quite right to give up the idea for herself; the fatigue and excitement would have been too much for her."

"Why is it that Miss Brindley's presentation is put off?" asked Reuben.

"Apparently because Aline has so strong a disinclination to its taking place at present. I never knew her so firm as she has been on the subject,—she who generally

yields to her mother in everything. I have my own idea about her motives, but I hardly like to breathe it, even to you."

"Oh, but tell me,—out with it."

"Remember, then, that it is only my opinion, and that I really have very little to go upon; and yet I do think that latterly, since Aline has been so much admired, Mrs. Brindley has become extravagantly ambitious for her daughter."

"Certainly she is a very pretty girl, and I used to fancy Lionel thought so. Indeed, I considered the mother rather made up to him. Surely, she would think Lionel a sufficiently good match?"

"I don't know, I am sure. Li used to be a great favorite, but I think she has cooled toward him lately. Phœbe brings me a good deal of gossip, she is at the Brindley's so much; and she says there is some rich man with a title who has got introduced to them lately, and who, it appears, was fascinated by seeing Aline at the Opera. Now, we all know that Mrs. Brindley has very little of what is called sentiment; but she does dearly love money, or, rather, all the good things which money will buy."

"But surely she will not sell her daughter to a man she did not like?" said Reuben, with some indignation.

"She would be shocked at such an insinuation," replied Catherine; "but prudence, as she sometimes reminds us, is one of the cardinal virtues; her prudence, however, is a very expansive affair,—like a large cloak, I sometimes fancy, worn over ugly things."

"But I think the girl likes Lionel," returned Reuben, "as well as that he admires her; though, if she can be persuaded to give him up for money or rank, he has a lucky escape from marrying her, that is all."

"If there really be an attachment," said Catherine, "I do not think Lionel need fear. From what I have observed lately, I think Aline is one of those rarely fine characters, who, out of gentleness and kindliness of nature, will

sacrifice to others all manner of trifling wishes and pleasures; but in matters of principle, or where the affections are concerned, can be firm as a rock. I am very fond of Aline, and should like her for a sister.".

"You are a good champion for her, at any rate," replied the husband, "though some people would say Lionel might do better."

"That's a horrid way of looking at it."

"I only said 'some people,' my darling; not that I so looked at it. But, after all, we are only speculating on what may be mere moonshine."

"Just so; and I think it will be time enough for poor Li to think of marrying when he is called to the Bar; and when he has paid his debts. It was very good of you, Reuben, to tell him to pay every one else before he paid you."

"Only right, I think. But I forgot to tell you he is going to send me a hundred pounds next week."

"Oh, I am so glad," exclaimed Catherine; "not on account of the money, but because it is a sign that he is getting out of debt. It is quite a shame that Mr. Rawlins has not paid you himself, since the money was borrowed for his use, and to meet his extravagances."

"Rawlins is little better than a regular blackleg," replied Reuben, with warmth. "I suppose Otway was much such another."

"I hope not, for Hester's sake," said Catherine.

"I dare say Hester takes after her mother. I have no quarrel with the women of that family; indeed, I always pitied the poor wife, and I cannot help liking Miss Otway. I assure you I've tried," he added, with a little emphasis.

"Rather hard upon poor Hester," said Catherine, after a moment's pause,—perhaps she remembered that little tale she had heard about Reuben's passing admiration of years ago; "and yet a great triumph for her to hold her own against your prejudice. I wonder if she will ever hear anything more of her father?"

"I think she will, and before very long. But, Kitty, you must not tell I say so. I am particularly warned to keep all we hear close."

"Then you have gained some information about him?"

"I believe so. If we are on the right scent, we know the name by which, for twenty years, he has passed, and we know the emissary he employed to bring the money to his daughter."

"You mean the elderly woman who so interested Aline Brindley?" said Catherine.

"I do. There's a mystery about her too; but I cannot see that we have much to do with that. She leads a perfectly harmless life, and has the appearance of a decayed gentlewoman; pays her way, but has no acquaintances; has a few letters now and then; generally, they bear the Melbourne postmark, but lately she had one from Natal, and in a handwriting that used to come from Australia."

"And do they watch for her letters, poor thing!" exclaimed Catherine, with indignant scorn. "Reuben, I wish you had nothing to do with these secret inquiry people, and their dirty work. It is not like you to use such tools, and I am sure no good will come of it."

"Don't suppose I like the work. I hate it. But it is perfectly lawful, and even necessary. Why do you say no good will come of it?"

"Because I have an instinct that says so."

"That's just like a woman. Women always put instinct above reason. Now, my reason tells me that truth will come of it; and that is the very good I am seeking."

"I hope from my heart, dear Reuben, that you may be right, and I wrong," said the wife. "I know that I often have strong opinions which I cannot easily argue about."

"And that is just what vexes me sometimes. I am sure, Kitty, I am never so pleased as when we think alike; and when we do not, if you could only convince me I am wrong, I would give way directly."

"I would rather, when we differ, be convinced by you at any time," replied Catherine. "But I admit that feelings and instincts are unmanageable, and generally refuse to be convinced of anything against their showing. But I will try to express in words what I feel about this Otway affair, if you like."

"I wish you would."

"I feel that when, for twenty years, God has allowed a mystery of this kind to remain unsolved, it acquires a sort of sacredness, as if He had had pity on the transgression, and was willing to consign it to oblivion."

"And yet we are told that the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, ultimately."

"Yes, at the Day of Judgment; but then, I believe, we shall be so horrified at seeing ourselves as we really are, we shall not have eyes for the sins of others."

"I suppose that is the orthodox way of looking at things," said Reuben; "but still, as long as we are in this world, I think we have a right to bring every sort of truth to light. Now, I want the truth about my poor father established once for all; and to do this I would willingly pay Otway's debts; but I don't believe there is need for this. If my information is correct, he has made a heap of money in the gold-fields, and already paid some of them off."

"I am so glad of this, if only for Hester's sake. But still I wish the story of his absconding were not being raked up; the present generation knows nothing about him; and there are some things that it seems but charity to let the moss of forgetfulness gather about. However, no doubt you know best."

"Whether I do or not," said Reuben, "I have gone too far to recede."

"Then I will say no more," returned the wife, "though I did wish you to know what I felt."

"I think I will order my horse, and have a gallop in the park. I seem to want fresh air to clear my brain."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A DRAWING-ROOM DAY.

IT was a Drawing-room day, and the different sections of London society concerned in that momentous circumstance were astir betimes. Great ladies, accustomed to the life of courts from their youth upward, perhaps feel no bounding of pulse on such occasions; yet even they are sometimes critical and anxious about feathers and laces, and, for half an hour, wrathful with that dilatory Madam F——, who never will send home a dress till the wearer is waiting to don it. Yet it does arrive just in time, and is so lovely, that Madam F—— is forgiven with only a warning about "another time;" a warning which she takes with a smile, as if it were a plenary indulgence. And the greatest of great ladies cares for her diamonds, and has them brushed and burnished, and laid for hours in the sunshine, if she knows what the *savants* say, that diamonds absorb light, and give back the radiance they have harbored.

Very young girls, again, shielded by the maternal wing, and with nerves unjaded, and too inexperienced of life to be very much frightened at anything, often bear themselves bravely through the ordeal of their "presentation." But novices of the class to which Catherine belonged, generally feel an excitement and feverish anxiety about the events which are a decided counterpoise to the honor and pleasure experienced. It is very well to take the necessary regulation lessons in the management of a long train, and the execution of the court courtesy; but few women who have encountered it deny the trial of nerve it is, when they have,

for the first time, to acquit themselves before royalty, and a host of critical observers. Nay, the mere physical fatigue that is undergone on these occasions is sometimes appalling, except to the very robust, and, latterly, Catherine could not be said quite to belong to that class.

But, besides the wearers of court dresses, and the milliners who *will* drive everything off to the last, and are rattling about in cabs, with their boxes and baskets, all the morning, there is an intermediate class who take delight in looking on, and admiring or criticising the appearance of their friends. Aline Brindley had persuaded her mother to put off their presentation for another year; but there was no reason why they should not gain a little knowledge of routine and etiquette by means of Mrs. Reuben Appersley's experience. Accordingly, it had been arranged that Mrs. Brindley and her daughter were to "come and see her dressed," and await her return, to hear all circumstances minutely detailed.

But when the appointed time arrived, no Mrs. Brindley or Aline appeared; upon which default Phœbe offered, begged indeed, to be allowed to go and fetch them. The distance to their home was so short, that she often did visit them alone, and no objection was made to the proposal. But Phœbe was a long time absent; a longer time, indeed, than could quite truthfully have been accounted for by even the state of affairs which she found at Mrs. Brindley's residence; and when she did return, she only brought with her Aline, who had barely five minutes of time allowed her in which to examine the various lovely fabrics which made up Catherine's court dress. Reuben had made this the occasion of completing his wife's suit of diamonds by giving her a tiara, which, even in the broad daylight, flashed brilliantly amid her dark hair. In truth, diamonds, and rare, soft lace, and the "court plumes," became Catherine admirably, seeming in perfect harmony with her style of beauty. There are women who look the worse the more richly they

are clothed; but Catherine was one who "carried off dress," and as Reuben helped her into the carriage, he had the grace to let her know how proud he felt of his wife.

Catherine smiled her pleasure that he was satisfied with her appearance; but sometimes she wished he would look deeper, and more often find something else than her beauty to praise. A great fault on her part was this discontent. To cease to admire the face and form of the beloved is the first outward token of love's decay. True love finds something admirable in the most homely features; true love is "sick unto death" when it sees the object of its regard only as others see it, and it would have been wiser of Catherine to rejoice that her husband still thought her so fair.

There was a mystery which even Aline had not solved that prevented her mother going to Telford House that day. Londoners, with their ten postal deliveries per day, are always liable to the plague of unwelcome letters, and just as Mrs. Brindley was preparing to start, she received a communication which moved her deeply, although she would not divulge to her daughter what the tribulation was.

"My dear," she replied, in answer to Aline's attempt at soothing, "it is from a person you never heard mentioned, —a person I thought dead long ago. Don't question me, or I shall be angry. Surely, I am not obliged to tell you everything."

"Oh, mamma, I never thought of such a thing," exclaimed Aline, hurt at the implied censure; "but it grieves me to see you in trouble, and to be so powerless to comfort you."

"You cannot comfort me; but if you wish to please me, leave me alone, and go to the Freeths, and make my apologies. I cannot accompany you,—I have something else to do."

"What shall I say?" asked the daughter, with a slight sigh, but desiring to be meekly obedient.

"Say I am not well; I am sure it is quite true."

"They will be so sorry, and will let me come home soon, I know," returned Aline.

"That is just what I do not require. You can stay as long as you like, and you can tell me everything about Mrs. Appersley's dress, and how she looks, and that will do just as well as my seeing her. What I chiefly want to know, is how much the whole affair costs."

"But, dear mamma, I cannot ask any questions of that sort."

"Of course you cannot in a rude, indelicate way; though, if you keep your wits about you, something may ooze out. However, it is of no consequence; I should not mind asking Mrs. Freeth, and she would tell me, I know. But really I cannot think about Mrs. Appersley just now. I certainly am glad we were not going to be presented today, that's all."

Of course this conversation caused some delay, and when Aline withdrew to write two or three needful little notes, preparatory to keeping her appointment with the Freeths, she fell into a reverie, out of which she was startled by the striking of the clock. The notes had to be written in haste, and they were scarcely finished when Phœbe Freeth was announced.

"I will not keep you three minutes," said Aline; "it is inexcusable of me to have brought you out to fetch me."

"Oh, it was a pleasant little walk," said Phœbe; "but, really, we have no time to lose. I was to tell you the carriage was ordered half an hour earlier than we said yesterday."

"Ah, had I known this, I really would have been punctual," replied Aline. "You will be sorry to hear that mamma cannot come with us. I was to say she does not feel well enough."

"Oh, what a pity!"

But by this time Aline had arranged her hat and buttoned her gloves, and in a few minutes the two girls were

threading briskly the three or four streets which alone intervened between the two residences, and were, as we know, just in time to see Catherine in all her splendor.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Brindley was occupied in a very different manner. Though not a crying woman generally, she shed some bitter tears in the solitude of her own room, as she looked out from her wardrobe the soberest-looking and least remarkable gown she could find, and for which she exchanged the rather pretty and very fashionable morning dress she had on. Then she selected the dowdiest bonnet of her stock, and a black silk mantle, and, thus equipped, came downstairs, and passed hastily out of the house, merely saying to the housemaid, "It is uncertain when I shall be home."

At the first stand she got into a cab, and told the driver to take her to a certain obscure street situated near the New Road. There was very little of the philosopher about Mrs. Brindley, but just now her mind was preternaturally strained, and she was sensitive to influences that, at a happier moment, would not in the least have affected her. As the cab moved along at a drawling pace, she felt she was passing into a new world. She had come into a district not only of mean houses, but of the mean shops which are always to be found in such a neighborhood. Small chandlers' shops, where dried fish hung side by side with tallow candles. Coal and coke merchants' warehouses, with small sacks of the fuel protruding on the pavement. Butchers' shops, where shreds of meat—rather than joints—looked carrion-like; and bakers' windows, where loaves were seen but dimly through dirty panes. But most mournful of all were the pawnbrokers' shops, with second-hand raiment hanging near the doors, flapping in the soft breeze, and suggesting all sorts of painful histories,—the workman's jacket and the neat cotton dress, the thin tawdry finery and the warm rabbit-skin tippet.

Dirty children, with tangled, unkempt hair, played in

the street, and a little girl, momentarily absorbed by the fascinations of a rag doll, was specially noticed by Mrs. Brindley, because the cabman pulled up sharply to prevent his wheels going over her. The lady even moralized to herself about the love of dolls, and the wonderful workings of the maternal instinct, coming round to a full recognition of the enormity of a woman who could neglect or desert her offspring.

Presently the cab turned into a street decidedly less squalid. A street inhabited, probably, by the patrons of the mean shopkeepers. She had not given any number, and the man drew up at his will, and Mrs. Brindley alighted, and discharged the vehicle. She walked half way down the street before she arrived at the house she was seeking, and realized something of the character of the locality. Three houses she passed bore intimations that apartments were to be let. One dwelling proclaimed its occupant a dress-maker, and at the next door a day-school was established. Under all the circumstances of the case, Mrs. Brindley was really to be pitied, for the ordeal which she was now enduring had not been brought about by any fault of her own.

With a tolerably steady hand she knocked at the door of a house that was a trifle more pretentious than the others, inasmuch as the windows looked brighter, and the doorsteps cleaner.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MRS. BRINDLEY DISCOVERS THAT GOLD IS HEAVY.

A GIRL in a pinafore—the landlady's daughter, who ran of errands and waited upon the lodger—opened the door, and for answer to Mrs. Brindley's inquiry if Mrs. Kar lived there, ushered her across the door-mat into a little front parlor. The room was empty, but Mrs. Brindley heard the patter of the girl's feet along the passage, and knew it was her voice that spoke to some one in the back room, saying:

"Here's a lady as wants you, Mrs. Kar."

It might be about five minutes that Mrs. Brindley was kept waiting, but the time seemed longer. She surveyed, to a very surfeit of observation, the common worn carpet, the faded curtains, the dim old-fashioned chimney glass, which reflected a cracked vase of paper flowers, and the chipped drops which, at irregular intervals, hung around a pair of ancient lustres. There was a horse-hair sofa opposite a stuffed chair, that, by a stretch of courtesy, might be called easy. A pembroke table was the centre ornament, and was draped with a perfectly fresh table-cover, so out of keeping with the shabbiness of its surroundings, that it looked what it was, —the private property of the "lodger." An open work-box, of the style of forty years ago, with faded blue satin lining, but with hinges and lock as true as ever, seemed, by its weight, to keep the table-cover steady, and to tell of feminine industry in the little parlor.

Mrs. Brindley had seated herself with her back to the window, so that she faced the folding-doors by which the

two parlors communicated, and through which the person she had come to visit in due time entered.

Mrs. Kar was on the border-land between what is called "elderly" and "old,"—that is to say, sixty years of age, fully rung out. Slight and fair still, a physiognomist could not doubt that she had once been a very lovely woman; but there came fitfully to her countenance such a deepening of its habitually mournful expression, that tender-hearted people had been known to question her in apprehension of some present pressing trouble. As she paused for a moment in the doorway, she looked more like a picture in its frame than a living woman. The curtains of a little bed made a drapery and shade at her back, while a sort of half light from the front window streamed upon her. Very pale she was, and her lips trembled for a moment before she uttered a word. Of course Mrs. Brindley had risen, but she also stood for a moment motionless. Then the elder woman moved forward a step, stretched out both hands with a gesture of deprecation, and exclaimed:

"Susan!"

"Is it true that you are my mother?" cried Mrs. Brindley, in that hard tone which makes words rattle like stones.

"Susan!" It seemed the only word that, as yet, Mrs. Kar could utter; but now she advanced into the room, and dropping into a chair, burst into a passion of tears.

"I suppose it must be so," returned Mrs. Brindley, her tone a little less flinty; "but your letter was a great surprise."

"No doubt you thought me dead," sobbed the other.

"Of course I did; indeed, my husband led me to believe so long years ago."

"He! Why, I wrote to him many times."

"You wrote to Major Brindley?"

"Yes, imploring for news of my child."

"He never told me. But I am sure he acted for the best."

"Ah, you think so! But it was a little cruel."

"I do not say it *was* for the best," exclaimed Mrs. Brindley; "I only say he thought so He was a good kind husband to me, and I do not like to hear him blamed."

"And because you remember him thus, never again will I speak the blame. I will try not even to think it."

There was a little pause, broken by Mrs. Brindley. Being a woman whose true sphere was a world of pettiness, the contemplation of great passions, the exhibition of strong emotions, always disturbed her, as if through a sense of injury, and, like all people of her class, she hated what she called a scene. (N. B.—Small natures never play the *prima donna's* part in a "scene.")

"It is altogether very painful," said Mrs. Brindley; "I really wish I knew what to say or do."

The hostess sighed audibly.

"I am sure you must know what a surprise your letter was," continued Mrs. Brindley; "and as you seemed anxious to see me, I thought I would come at once. But how can we feel other than as strangers? You know I can have no recollections. I was in my cradle when you—" yet even Mrs. Brindley had not quite the nerve to finish the sentence.

"When I left my home," said the other, "my husband, and my child. True, dreadfully true; but I have learned to face the truth these many long years."

"Well, then, what is it you expect from me? I am afraid you are in want, and I assure you my income is very small."

"Be at rest on that point. I have sufficient for my needs. Till I was assured of a provision, I refrained from approaching you."

"Then what is it you want?" asked Mrs. Brindley, in

a voice so softened from her first manner, that it sounded, by comparison, like one of sympathy.

"A little human love and kind compassion," said Mrs. Kar, again burying her face in her hands.

"I am sure I wish I knew what to say or do," repeated Mrs. Brindley, drawing her chair nearer to the elder woman, and even touching her arm with a gesture that was intended for soothing. Now that she knew money help was not wanted, the daughterly part was not quite so hard to play. "I am sure I wish I knew how to comfort you," she continued; "after all, it is certain you have suffered."

"Suffered!"

"I am sorry if I hurt you by saying so," exclaimed Mrs. Brindley, who was really startled by the emphasis with which the word had been repeated.

"You did not hurt me; it was the right word, only you can never know how much I have suffered. I do not even wish that you should."

"But you are not very old," returned the visitor, really trying hard to say and do what seemed, to her cold nature, to be kind and discreet. "You are not yet very old, and, as you tell me you have plenty of money, I don't see why you should not make yourself comfortable. Though I think you have chosen your residence in a miserable neighborhood."

"The neighborhood suits a person who, before all things, desires obscurity. Susan, whatever you know of your mother's history, you must have heard only from those who scorned and hated her with unpitying wrath. Can you bear to hear it from her own lips?"

"Yes, I think it would be well for me to know everything."

"So be it. Yet I will make the tale as brief as I can, and speak as little ill of your father as need be. I was a portionless girl, married at eighteen to a man of reputed

wealth. I was dutiful, and obeyed the relatives who had brought me up, being myself altogether innocent of love and life. They meant well—I can see that now—and were themselves misled. They thought the leopard could change his spots,—in other words, that a *roué* in middle age would reform, and make a good husband.

Bitter was my awakening, as, fold by fold, my horrible life seemed to unwind before me. Even during the brief space when I was treated with the fondness the new toy called forth, the fondness was fitful, capricious, and selfish; nothing to which a young heart could respond with grateful love and trust. But, oh, when the evil days set in, bearing on their strong tide cold contempt and bitter insults, brutal acts and harsh tyranny, the world seemed changed to a vast pandemonium, from which there was no escape. In those days, people in general were less pitiful toward a wife's troubles than I think they are now. Marital separations always more or less branded the women, and divorces, though not impossible, were rare and costly. Oh, my trials were very great!"

"Yes," observed Mrs. Brindley, "every one admitted you had a bad husband, and it was a dreadful thing for me not to be able to respect even my father."

"Very dreadful, to be soul orphaned, as I consider you were," said the hapless mother; "so dreadful, that, had I realized the truth, your little life would have saved me from my sin. But I was young and inexperienced, and had had but slight moral and religious training, wherefore an unholy attachment gained the mastery. Surely, I do not gloss anything, or extenuate over much. I was tempted, and I fell. I have been a great sinner."

"It is a shocking story; but I do pity you, indeed I do," sighed Mrs. Brindley.

"Bear with me to the end, and be sure of this,—I will not call foul things fair. In my great ignorance of law, and the realities of life, I thought I should be able to hide

my child. Consequently, I planned to take you away; but the nurse whom I had trusted to bring you to the rendezvous, betrayed me. If betrayed is too harsh a word, let me say she deceived me, and broke her promise. At any rate, the irrevocable step was taken before I realized that I had deserted my child. I grieved, I wept, I called myself heart-broken; the brand of shame even seemed then not so dreadful as the loss of my child; but it is necessary to remember that I was under the influence of a great strong passion, and its guilty pleadings stifled, in some measure, the cries of duty. But there are sinners and sinners,—at least, to me it seems so; and at the close of my career, I am able to thank God that He turned aside all the specious tempting baits, and paid me in His own just wages. Of course, I did not feel this gratitude in early days. I pined for love and peace, which never could be mine, as if I had deserved them, and slowly found out for myself that in guilt there could be no joy.

"My husband had dissipated the greater part of his fortune, but he was still rich enough to carry a divorce bill through the House of Lords, as I and another person hoped he would do. Alas for our expectations! Mr. Karvill's own life had been so evil, that the usual redress for his injury was denied him.

"Need I tell you how, by sure degrees, the life I had entered on became simply intolerable. Mine was not the common story of seduction and desertion. *He* never cast me off. But as the real hard facts of social life opened out to me, and God's immutable laws of right and wrong imprinted themselves on my heart, one thing became apparent beyond all else. Happiness was not for me; but if peace could ever be found, it must be by listening to the voice of conscience so lately wakened up. I tore myself away from him who had led me astray, strengthened in my resolve by the knowledge that the life of guilty mystery we were leading—for the world at large never knew the

real name of my companion—was, in reality, sapping his mental powers, and ruining his prospects in life. We neither of us belonged to the class who can live peacefully in shame. We had slipped out of the straight path, but were not of the accustomed travellers in the thorny cross-roads yet.

"Sometimes we talked of our position almost as if we were discoursing of other persons; but always with the same result,—the wrench must proceed from me. Finally, I decided to go to Australia. I was, intellectually, what is called well educated, and was quite competent to be a governess in the colonies. *He* paid for my passage, and at our tearful parting forced some money upon me. I assumed the half of my name, and the new life began.

"It would take a volume to narrate the strange people I encountered, and the half adventurous life I led. Years passed on. I was earning my living, and busily useful in many ways, I had less and less time for painful memories. It is true that I hid the dark half of my history, even as I hid the half of my name; but the evil day came when some one or other recognized me, and bruited my story. My character—false character, if you like to call it—stood so high, that if I had resolutely denied the accusation, I should have been implicitly believed; but I did not load my conscience with the fresh guilt of a falsehood. In bitter anguish I pleaded that in my new life I had striven to do my duty, and with even some indignation repudiated the idea that I could have contaminated the young. I, who had been watchful with the keen watchfulness of knowledge over the first budding of evil, to nip and blight them at once! But it was the way of the world to call my good conduct hypocrisy.

"I had saved a few pounds, so was not at once destitute; but my little store of money soon dwindled, even though I eked out my means by needle-work. But I think a woman should have blameless and happy memories to ply the

needle for a length of time contentedly. I know the mere mechanical employment nearly maddened me. I fell ill with a low nervous fever, during which there were many days of unconsciousness and delirium. I might have died, I think, but for the skill and kindness of the doctor, who attended me without fee or reward.

"When I was sufficiently recovered to discuss plans for the future, Mr. Oldfield, the doctor, startled me by the proposal that I should become his housekeeper. Not that there was anything incongruous in the arrangement, for I was ten years older than he, and looked even much more than forty. I gladly accepted the offer, and entered upon my new duties as soon as my strength permitted. This was an important epoch in my life. My employer, master, friend —I hardly know which to call him—contrary to the usual custom of medical men, made many changes of domicile; but I was always willing to attend him. He was a skilful practitioner, and wherever he settled for a time, found patients. I, too, learned to dispense drugs, and picked up some elementary knowledge. The day came when my benefactor sickened for an illness which he knew would run its alarming course. We were in a remote place at the time, far removed from all help, but he had just the power to instruct me what to do under all possible coming contingencies, and I had strength and understanding given me to carry out his directions. When, after days, with regard to which his memory was a blank, consciousness returned, he declared that we were quits now, for if, under God's providence, he had once saved my life, I now had saved his.

"Hardly was Mr. Oldfield recovered, when there came to me the news of my husband's death. Old news, that had taken a year to reach me; and almost simultaneously I received a communication from the object of my early guilty passion, offering to give me the protection of his name, declaring his readiness to make me his wife. Oh, Susan, the temptation was great, the trial supreme!"

"And why did you not accept his only reparation?" exclaimed Mrs. Brindley, in unfeigned astonishment.

"For reasons that my inmost soul spoke loudly. Youth and beauty, which once he had prized, were no longer mine; and I was conscious of having lost something of my early refinement. How could it have been otherwise under the circumstances I have described? I should only have been to him a bitter disappointment and daily reproach; and I preferred remaining to him a chastened memory. But I think I may add that some less selfish motives strengthened my refusal. He had risen to fame and influence in the world,—marriage with me would have set tongues tattling, and have tarnished his name to a certain degree."

"Well, I must say I think you made a great mistake," exclaimed Mrs. Brindley; "a middle-aged man in a good position can do pretty much as he likes with regard to marrying, and even if he had suffered a little, it would have been no more than he deserved."

"Ah," sighed the other, "you cannot see things as I saw them. I had been forced to bear the brand; I knew its smart, though I had grown used to suffering. Nothing of personal joyousness remained for me; my best satisfaction was serving and sacrificing myself for others."

"Well, if you feel it so, nothing more is to be said; though, for my part, I should have thought the protection of a husband very desirable."

"Once I, too, should have thought so; but that time was past. However, I must hurry on with the details of my life. Mr. Oldfield speculated, made much money in consequence of the gold discoveries, and I participated in the gains. I kept accounts for him, and was often nurse to his patients. I can satisfy my conscience that what I possess I have earned, save, indeed, that I once accepted a handful of gold from a dying man, who told me that my three days of gentle nursing was all the kindness he had known

since his mother blessed him on her death-bed. In her name, and for her sake, he implored me to take it without scruple."

"And how long have you been in England?" asked Mrs. Brindley, a little abruptly.

"Ah, that I must not exactly tell you. I came to England on a confidential errand, for which, again, I have been fairly, not extravagantly, paid. It is pleasant to remember that I am trusted most by those who know me best."

"You seem to me to have been a blessing to some people," observed Mrs. Brindley; "and the recollection of this ought to comfort you—mother!"

The word, the one word the poor frail woman had pined to hear, was uttered at last, and in her emotion she grasped her daughter's hand, and leaned forward for a kiss.

"Bless you for that word!" she exclaimed; "and it emboldens me to say what is near my heart. Do not be alarmed. I know very well, that, for your sake, our relationship must be concealed; but let me know your daughter. Surely, it would be a true thing to call me a poor relation,—a relation you had thought dead till today."

"Of course that would be possible," replied Mrs. Brindley, after a slight pause; "that is, if you are very much bent upon it; but don't you think it would be painful for everybody?"

"*I* would try to bear all the pain," murmured Mrs. Kar.

"With the best intention in the world, I don't see how you could," sighed Mrs. Brindley. "Aline is very quick and clear-seeing, and would be sure to wonder she had never heard of such a relation."

Mrs. Kar sighed audibly.

"I don't know how to manage," continued Mrs. Brindley. "I am sure, from everything you say, you would be very sorry to blight Aline's prospects, or to injure her in any way."

"Injure her!" exclaimed Mrs. Kar. "I have seen my granddaughter, and it is no figure of speech to say that I would die for her."

"You have seen her!" cried Mrs. Brindley in astonishment; "oh, tell me when and where!"

"I cannot, because the declaration that you ask would betray the secret of another."

"How strange that is."

"Yes, it is strange; like so many of the coincidences in my sad life. But be under no apprehension; it was but once I saw her, and then only as an obscure individual; it is most unlikely that I made the slightest impression on her mind."

"Did she hear your name?" inquired Mrs. Brindley.

"No; I was a nameless stranger, that, for a moment, crossed her path, now nearly a year ago."

"And you have been thus long in England?"

"Yes; on the confidential business to which I alluded. Till quite recently I considered myself pledged to the utmost privacy and secrecy."

"I am sure I wish I knew what to do for the best," mused Mrs. Brindley.

"Think it over, Susan, and come and see me again. Meanwhile, I want to give you something, if you will accept a present from me."

So saying, Mrs. Kar withdrew for a few moments, but returned, carrying a small but evidently heavy box, which she placed on a chair, and unlocked. It was a box with a tray, and this first compartment was filled with those odds and ends of womanly belongings which are generally designated rubbish. Old gloves and faded ribbons, torn lace and yellowish muslin, antiquated patterns and scraps for patchwork, were the articles which first displayed themselves. But before Mrs. Kar lifted the tray of "rubbish," she took the precaution of locking both the doors of the little parlor.

"My landlady is deaf," observed Mrs. Kar, "or I should have feared to talk so freely. But her eyes are of the sharpest, and though she has seen the lid open as you see it now, I think she puzzles a little at the weight of the box, a weight which I propose a little to relieve."

So saying, she removed the tray. Her next proceeding being to lift out divers little bags and parcels, several of which she emptied into her lap.

"You perceive," sighed Mrs. Kar, "I am not so very poor as at first you feared. These nuggets of gold would stand between me and want for many a day. But I hope I may never need them, for a certain sum of money has been lately sunk as a life annuity for me, and my income, as I told you before, is sufficient for my wants. Do take what you like, and have it made into jewelry for your daughter."

Mrs. Brindley only half concealed her astonishment. She was not used to seeing lumps of gold poured into a lady's lap, and passed through the fingers as if they were so many ordinary playthings. She instinctively made a rough calculation of the value of what was before her, and estimated that there was at least two or three hundred pounds' worth of gold, from which she was asked to take "what she liked."

"I am sure, mother," she exclaimed, "I am sure you are very kind and generous; it is what I never could have expected, and I do feel quite grateful. It would be very nice for Aline to have a handsome brooch and earrings made, and I really do want a new chain myself."

"Oh, take plenty, and for a rich bracelet besides. The best way will be to let the jeweller pay himself with gold, and then the ornaments will cost you nothing. Only there it a little nugget here, naturally very nearly in the shape of a heart. I should like my granddaughter to keep it just as it is; it is weak of me, perhaps, to care for such a thing, but I do."

"And so she shall. Oh, I must tell her something about you. How else can I account for all this treasure?"

The look of pain which made her countenance so very sad, passed over the elder woman's face. But she had for long years accepted suffering as her portion; and it was but a momentarily fiercer heat of the furnace in which she was being tried, if she thought that her "nuggets" were to be the golden keys to open out her heart's desire. In truth, this erring woman had learned the last and most difficult lesson of Christian love, fully and freely to forgive, as she herself hoped to be forgiven. She rebuked her own jealous thought, made large allowance for her daughter's first indecision, and even thanked her warmly for the promise she implied.

"At all events, you will come and see me again soon," she cried, as, at last, Mrs. Brindley prepared to take leave.

"Oh, yes; and if I can be a comfort and of use, I will. Thank you again and again for your present. But, dear me, what a weight it is. Luckily, I know my pockets are strong, and I shall take a cab at the first stand. Oh, don't cry, pray don't!"

"It does me good, indeed it does. But I will try to be calm, if my tears pain you."

CHAPTER XL.

AFTER THE DRAWING-ROOM.

IN the opening scene of the last act of Shakespeare's greatest love-drama, there is a wondrous touch of truth; one of his lightning flashes, that show for a moment the heights and depths of his psychical experience. With all the coils of the great woe, the great mistake, ready to enthral him, Romeo exclaims exultingly:

"My bosom's lord sits lightly in its throne."

And there are few of us, I think, who do not know how often a feeling of more than common serenity is made the prelude to change and turmoil, momentous events or deep sorrows. Is it that the lull is given that strength may be gathered up ready to meet the coming strain or shock?

Mrs. Reuben Appersley's presentation had gone off charmingly; and though she was very sensible of bodily fatigue as she drove home from the Palace, she was pleased and satisfied in no common degree. I have altogether failed in depicting Catherine, if I have not made it apparent that she was keenly alive to the enjoyment of everything that was beautiful in nature and art. And let cynics say what they will, there is a potent spell exercised by the panoply of a court. To be fair among the fairest of a bevy of beautiful, gorgeously-attired women bent on homage to the loftiest lady in the land, the very queen of queens in the world's history, is surely something to cause a little self-complacency, all the more harmless for being self-recog-

nized! Catherine had no vanity—she was too earnest, had not froth enough in her nature to be vain—but she knew her own qualities, and could measure them justly, leaving her own heart full of reverence for all that seemed above and beyond it. She was singularly content just now. That the great event had passed off without *contretemps* of any sort was not only a natural satisfaction and most agreeable recollection, but a fact that would give intense pleasure to all her family; and she pictured to herself her father's quiet smile, her mother's eager interrogations, and her husband's honest pride and delight. After all, perhaps they were right in desiring her to be presented,—if her husband went to the Levée, why not she to the Drawing-room? Perhaps her condemnation of middle-class ambition was a mistake; at any rate, she no longer regretted the step she had taken. Doubtless, it would have its advantages many ways.

It was in this pleasant, satisfied mood that Catherine drove home; but hardly had she alighted from the carriage, when she perceived that there was some trouble in the house. In the first place, instead of a man-servant, it was "doll's face" that opened the door, and the girl looked grave as she said:

"Missis bid me to tell you, ma'am, that little Miss Lucy is ill, and she can't leave her; and I was to ask you not on no account to go near the room, for it is most likely a 'fectious fever she says, though there's no knowing till the doctor comes. Parkins has gone after him now."

"Oh, can't I see mamma?" exclaimed Catherine. "She said this morning the child had a feverish cold. I hope my little sister is not seriously ill. I can soon take off this finery, and then I might be of some use."

"Missis told me, ma'am, most particularly," continued the girl, "that I was to beg of you not to be anxious, and that I was to see that a cup of tea was ready for you, and she thought I had better set it in the library, where you

would be sure to be quiet. She knew you would be tired, and said you ought to have it directly."

"Well, I suppose I shall please mamma best by doing as she wishes; and it is true that I am dreadfully tired," said Catherine, entering the library as she spoke. "But please tell her that I hope she will see me as soon as the doctor has been. I shall be glad to have some tea; but when I ring, it will be for my maid. I shall be thankful to take off my train."

At this moment there was a knock at the street door, which now was opened by Burton, and the voice that inquired if Mrs. Freeth were at home, was that of Mr. Raybrooke.

Yes, Mrs. Freeth was at home, but unable to see visitors,—Burton explaining the sad reason.

"I am indeed sorry!" exclaimed Algernon, and his sonorous tone penetrated to the library, the door of which was ajar. "Very, very sorry," he continued, drawing a card from its case; "but perhaps Mrs. Appersley will see me,—is she at home?"

"I'll take your name, sir," replied the woman, who, having small faith in "coincidences," was perfectly sure the visitor knew Mrs. Appersley had returned home; so short a time was it since she entered the house, that probably he had seen her alight from the carriage.

"You may mention," added Raybrooke, "that I should be very glad to see one of the ladies, if convenient, having something to say."

"Ask Mr. Raybrooke to come into the library," said Catherine, raising her voice a little, so that her words were heard by the visitor.

Gladly obedient to such an invitation, he advanced, and in a moment they shook hands, with smiles of kindly greeting.

Catherine, in the bloom of young womanhood—a trifle flushed, it might be, by the excitement of the day—was

handsome enough to look radiant under that great trial,—full dress by daylight. It is true the sunlight was tempered by Venetian blinds, which made just that *demi-jour* in which the diamonds round her throat and in her hair scintillated with a dazzling lustre. But still the light was garish enough to be a severe ordeal.

Algernon had seen too many women of fashion in their court dresses, to be in the slightest degree awed by any of the customary paraphernalia, and yet he did not easily restrain an exclamation of admiration as he looked at Catherine. Quite natural was it to talk a little of the events of the day, which they were discussing with some animation, when Burton came into the room, with a message of apology from Mrs. Freeth,—which, however, relieved anxiety concerning Lucy, as the doctor's report was favorable—and a renewed reminder about the tea.

"I believe dear mamma is half afraid I shall die of starvation, some day," said Catherine, with a smile; "she is always so anxious about me. But today she is quite right, for I am very tired. Do you ever take afternoon tea? May I help you to a cup?" she continued, preparing to pour out the tea as she spoke.

"Let me do all this," said Algernon, "and wait upon you, as is becoming. It is a pity for you to destroy the *posé* of a queen, or ruffle those waves of silk, which take three chairs to support them;" and suiting the action to the word, he twirled the library table, so that the tray came round to his side. "Ah," he continued, "you smile at me for undertaking such a feminine office."

"Nay," exclaimed Catherine, "I am only very grateful for being helped and waited on."

"You are very gracious; but it is I who am grateful for being permitted to serve. In the old Troubadour days it would have been on bended knee—"

"Ah," interrupted Catherine gayly, "but in the old Troubadour days there was no five o'clock tea to be handed!

Which small fact prevents me regretting them very much. Thanks. You really are quite an accomplished tea-maker."

"The bachelor's necessity has made me so, then," returned Raybrooke, with the faintest possible sigh. "When a man has made tea for himself a hundred times, he does grow accomplished in the art. Besides, I rather despise people with coarse palates, who cannot tell good things from bad. Don't you?"

"I hardly know. I have not thought on the subject. Perhaps in some respects they are to be envied."

"Not always, I think; for sometimes the obtuseness runs through the nature. The most refined, cultivated, and generous-hearted people I know, condescend to consider the requirements of the table; though, of course, with a happy moderation. For instance, there is Lady Hartrington,—you know what charming dinners she gives."

The words were spoken, and surely they seemed harmless enough; but the next moment Algernon would have given much to recall them. All the incidents of that dinner, when he and Catherine first met, had flashed upon his mind even before the words were uttered; but now the memory seemed a burning anguish. He had thought himself so self-sustained, so self-controlled, that he could toy with danger; but this *tête-à-tête* with Catherine, a privilege he had never before for a moment known, seemed suddenly to have become perilous and bewildering. She had no prompt answer to his commonplace remark, and Algernon saw that her cup slightly shook in her hand; while a faint flush that appeared when it faded, left her cheek paler than before. He was assured that she too remembered with singular distinctness that fateful day, and his man's heart bounded with a wild, unreasoning triumph.

Yet it was but a few moments before Catherine said:

"Yes, Lady Hartrington is in all respects the most charming hostess in the world."

"And the warmest, truest friend," cried Raybrooke.

"What a happy man Sir Jasper must be to have been forty years married to such a woman!"

"Married forty years!" exclaimed Catherine.

"Yes; she told me so the other day, and expatiated on the delight of married people growing old together. I think she feels as sure of reunion beyond the grave—as—as—well, as she does of their concord lasting till death. But I shall grow absurdly romantic if I talk longer of Lady Hartrington; and do you know I called here today with a purpose,—yes, the purpose of taking a great liberty."

"That is something difficult for me to realize," said Catherine, with a sort of courteous dignity. "I am persuaded that what you call a liberty is some sort of great kindness."

"I mean it as a kindness, believe me, and I think it is something more,—a duty. Briefly, let me say what prompted my visit today. During the last few months Mrs. Freeth has paid me the high honor of treating me as a friend, speaking of many things in which she was deeply interested. I know that Mr. Rawlins is no longer welcomed here; and I feel that I should tell what I have seen without delay,—your sister is so young, so inexperienced;" and, with a natural hesitation, Algernon paused a moment.

"My sister—which sister?" exclaimed Catherine. "Oh, Mr. Raybrooke, what is it you know? what is it you have seen?"

"Simply this. Today, only a few houses up, I witnessed a street meeting between your sister Phœbe and Mr. Rawlins. I saw them saunter up and down a quiet street in close and earnest conversation, and too much absorbed in each other to notice me. It is true, I took some pains to escape observation."

"Phœbe!—Mr. Rawlins!" exclaimed Catherine; "this morning!—oh, I remember, she did go out alone; but surely she is to be trusted. Oh, Mr. Raybrooke, are you tain there is no mistake?"

"Quite certain," said Algernon gravely. "You see now the liberty I have taken in interfering with so very delicate an affair."

"Rather the good deed you have done," returned Catherine warmly. "Painful as the incident is, we must be infinitely obliged to you for making it known. He must be a thoroughly bad man to take advantage of a young girl's ignorance, for I cannot believe that Phœbe is aware of the impropriety of her conduct. The acquaintance must be broken off at all hazards; but, oh, I am stricken with shame and sorrow!" and, fairly overcome by her feelings, she burst into tears.

"Ah, this is what I dreaded!" exclaimed Algernon; "but it seemed to me wiser and kinder to tell mother or sister, than to mix up men with such a story."

"Much—much!" replied Catherine.

"Then you acquit me of being a busy-body?"

"Pray do not so miscall yourself; though, for my own part, I think there are many more sins of negligence and indifference committed in the world, than of undue interference in the concerns of others. I can fancy that three-fourths of our acquaintances, seeing what you saw, would only have shook their heads and shrugged their shoulders, —never have had the moral courage to take the step you have done. If my sister is to be saved from an unhappy entanglement, you will have been the means."

"She is so young," said Algernon. "I hope she will only be pitied, not blamed."

"I am sure I pity her from the depths of my heart," replied Catherine, "for Phœbe's position is peculiar. I wonder," she continued, as if from the impulse of a sudden thought; "I wonder if Mr. Rawlins ever heard that Phœbe is independent of her family?"

"Is it so?" exclaimed Algernon, with surprise.

"Yes; her godmother left her a fortune; but I do not see how Mr. Rawlins can know it."

"Depend upon it he does; and that he is a deeper-dyed villain than I thought. Horsewhips were made purposely for such shoulders as his," and Algernon spoke with only half-repressed wrath.

"Oh, we will hope not. Phœbe is thought pretty, and he may really admire her. But it is mean beyond measure to seek her in this clandestine manner."

"I heartily agree with you; but a gambler has no honor. It is one of the earliest stakes he loses."

"Ah, I too detest gambling."

"Of course you do, or you would not be yourself. I maintain that gambling—and there is gambling of a worse sort than with cards and dice—is more demoralizing even than drunkenness."

"More?"

"Yes, by many degrees. I say so, much as I abhor intemperance. One class of drunkards lose themselves, poor wretches, in their endeavors either to drown care, or to prop up the falling energies of an overtaxed system; and the other and yet more guilty ones, at any rate, have companions who share their false and fleeting enjoyment; nay, they are often led into their besetting sin by their genial qualities and convivial tastes. But the gambler is a heartless, selfish demon, whose gain is another's loss; who's joy is bought by another's woe. Oh, Mrs. Appersley, your sister must be saved from any entanglement with Cuthbert Rawlins."

"Mamma must be told, I fear; and yet she is in such trouble just now about Lucy's illness. Oh, it is all so sad. I wonder, though, if I could influence Phœbe? I think I will try. Papa is out of town, and my husband is at the House—there is something special for which he wants to vote—and I have but you to advise me. Of course I shall not mention your name to my sister."

"As you please; but for her sake, I think it would be better not. Poor child, she would perhaps feel pained

to know I saw her. Ah, I am young in years to be a mentor, but I often feel old; I suppose I have so exhausted life."

"You exhausted life!" cried Catherine, in unfeigned astonishment.

"There are days and hours when I feel utterly hopeless; and I am afraid today I am in one of my dark moods. Pray forgive the egotism of bad spirits."

"You hopeless? Oh, Mr. Raybrooke, you should always come to your friends when what you call a dark mood is on you. Low spirits are often fostered by solitude and inaction. I have sometimes thought that the small troubles of life melt away like snow in the sunshine, when we talk them over with a friend."

"Ah," sighed Raybrooke, "the small troubles. And even the troubles which are not small, like the one which brought me here today, may be lightened and dissipated by discussion, as long as there is something to be done. While the battle of life is raging, each soldier hopes for victory. But there are cases in which the colors seem struck, and nothing is worth striving after. But why on earth do I talk in this way to you?"

Ah, why indeed! Unless to prove for the millionth time how dangerous it is to skirt precipices and to skate on thin ice, though the precipices be but forbidden subjects, and the thin ice words that veil more than they express. Ah, why did he linger, now that the object of his visit was achieved? why yield to the fascination of the hour as Catherine in her regal beauty sat before him? It was so sweet —so very sweet—to talk with her in confidence thus; surely his worship was the worship of the moth for the star. For worlds, he would not have had her know that it was his loitering with the hope of seeing her, for one flashing moment only, that led to his discovering Phœbe's indiscretion. But with the ferment of dangerous thoughts in his mind, he still kept true to his best intentions; and in

answer to some really commonplace deprecation from Catherine, he rose to go.

"Forgive me this one," he exclaimed, "and I will try never again to distress you with my bear's growl at life. Do you know I am thinking of going abroad for an indefinite time?—half a dozen years perhaps. All round the world—North Pole—South Pole—Polynesian Islands,—somewhere or other; perhaps I shall shake the black dog off my shoulders."

"All round the world! half a dozen years!" exclaimed Catherine, who had risen from her chair. "Oh, how many friends will miss you!"

"Will they? but for all that I shall go. What if I say good-by to you now?"

He held out his hand, and their eyes met. In the look there was neither guilt nor shame; but each one read the secret of the other's heart, and the writing of it was that mournfullest phrase, "Too late!"

The next minute, overcome by bodily exhaustion and mental strain, Catherine fainted. The seizure was so sudden, that she would have fallen had not Algernon caught her in his arms and drawn her to a sofa. He called loudly for help, but even as he did so, he weakly yielded to the sudden, strong temptation that assailed him, and kissed her forehead. That he repented the next moment did not undo the fault. Then he rang the bell violently, a summons answered with wonderful promptness by Burton. Indeed, the woman was in the room before he heard her step; he was little aware that the door had been ajar, and she a listener during a greater part of his visit.

CHAPTER XLI.

REUBEN "KNOWS THOROUGHLY WELL WHAT HE IS ABOUT."

IT was a dead swoon into which, for the first time in her life, Catherine had fallen. For several minutes she was utterly unconscious of anything that happened; but when the color returned to her cheeks, and her eyes opened, she found herself carefully tended by her sister Jane and Hester Otway, who at the very moment of her seizure had returned from their afternoon walk. Burton, also, was in attendance, as well as Catherine's own maid, and the air was redolent of salvolatile and eau-de-cologne, while Jenny, with tearful face, was kneeling beside the sofa, holding smelling salts for Catherine to inhale.

We have all heard of death in a ball-room and death on the stage, and imagination cannot readily picture anything more ghastly than such events. And in a lesser but still proportionate degree it jars on our sense of the fitness of things when physical suffering is associated with gorgeous attire. It seemed the first desire of every one to get rid of the court trappings, and the maid was despatched for a morning wrapper and shawl, that Catherine might at once be released from her heavy dress.

Meanwhile, Algernon Raybrooke was leaning on the mantel-piece in the dining-room, to which apartment he had withdrawn directly his bell-ringing had brought efficient help. The seizure having taken place in his presence, it was quite natural that he should desire to linger about

the house until Catherine should be in some measure recovered; but he was not unduly anxious about her. Remembering his own wild words and subsequent want of self-control, he was not sure that a simple fainting fit was not a fortunate termination to that memorable interview. Resting his elbow on the marble, his head drooped, and his eyes fixed themselves on the ashes in the grate. For the fire, pleasant in the early morning hours, had long since died out. His morbid imagination found in the burnt-out cinders a type of his own heart; and in something of a Pagan spirit, he accepted the omen. Nevertheless, his mind was seething with plans and purposes, every one of which had for its aim to make the future serene for Catherine. Yes, he would go abroad for years, and yet in all respects he would act so discreetly, that the subtlest discerner of secret things should never suspect the great disappointment of his life.

Presently, Hester Otway came into the room to bring him the good tidings that Catherine was recovered, and, it might be, to question Mr. Raybrooke in some slight degree concerning the circumstances which preceded the fainting fit; but Algernon was already well prepared for this probable emergency.

"I assure you," he exclaimed, "I feel myself shockingly to blame, and wholly inexcusable. I ought to have seen and known how excessively fatigued Mrs. Appersley was, and not have stayed babbling as I did. In fact, she told me what a tiring day it had been, and I ought to have taken the hint. What business has a man to indulge in five o'clock tea? but I confess that is a weakness of mine."

"A very excusable weakness, I am sure," said Hester, with a smile; "after all, it was rather a lucky thing that you were in the room, if the fainting was, as you say, merely from over fatigue; it might have taken place when she was quite alone, and then might have been really serious."

Algernon had not said "merely" from over fatigue, but he did not correct the speaker, and Hester continued:

"I am glad to tell you that Mrs. Appersley is now really quite herself, and she wishes me to thank you for your prompt attention. Though she remembers nothing, she is sure you must have prevented her falling to the ground. She hopes, however, you will excuse seeing her again today."

"Certainly, certainly! I would not intrude for the world. May I charge you, Miss Otway, to make my adieux and compliments, and also kind remembrances to Mrs. Freeth; I am so grieved for her present anxiety about the younger children. Oh, dear, what a useless animal a man is! If I were but a lady friend, I might, perhaps, be of some service. But pray tell her if I can go anywhere, or do anything for her, I hope she will command me."

"I am sure she will be sorry not to have seen you,—but you know what a mother she is, and can imagine how she is absorbed at the present moment. I will not forget to tell her what you say, and I am certain she will be very grateful for your kind offer."

"I mean what I say," resumed Algernon, "and far more than I can express. I should feel it the greatest pleasure and privilege to be of service to any one of the family. But perhaps," he continued, "the best thing I can now do is to take myself off."

So saying, he shook hands with Hester, and in another minute was out of the house.

Mrs. Freeth was quite resolute in her determination that Janet Gillespie and herself should be the only watchers by the sick-bed of little Lucy. The mother and old nurse were too experienced in the ailments of children to have had any doubt that the illness was scarlet fever, even before the physician asserted that such was the case. He, however, comforted them greatly by his assurance that there were no alarming symptoms; therefore, her duties were simple, and perhaps this very circumstance rendered Mrs. Freeth pos-

itively obstinate on the point of not admitting Catherine, even up the stairs which led to the floor on which the nursery was situated. She heard of her return from the Drawing-room,—heard even that she had taken the tea which had been ordered, and there her anxiety about Catherine terminated, for no one had been so unkind as to tell her of the fainting fit. As for her little feminine curiosity about the details of the presentation, it dwindled into insignificance amid the cares of the sick-room. The perfection of the barley water was just now of much greater consequence than the admiration of a prince or the smile of a duchess.

By dinner time Catherine was sufficiently recovered to take the head of the table; her only companions being Phœbe and Jane, and Hester Otway. From them she heard of the arrangements which had been promptly made to isolate the nursery floor, and realized how completely for the present she was separated from her mother. She felt also keenly aware that on her had devolved the elder-sisterly duty of protecting Phœbe. But on this point she determined to take counsel of her husband.

It was nearly midnight when Reuben Appersley returned from the House of Commons; and Catherine, having long since dismissed her maid, was reclining on the sofa in her bed-chamber, with candles lighted, and a book beside her. She had attempted to read, but her mind had wandered from the author's theme, and after a vain effort to control her thoughts, she had given up the task. A glance at her husband, as he entered the room, showed her that something must have gone right with him,—that something had put him in that degree of good spirits, which, with many men, means good temper, and establishes the happy hour in which it is wisest to discuss domestic affairs, seek counsel, or, it may be, ask a concession. The fact was, that not only a bill, in which he was much interested, had that night passed the Commons, but within these few hours he had

received intelligence which convinced him that George Otway was alive, and, moreover, in England.

These satisfactory events were narrated to his wife in a few pithy sentences, and then he began questioning her about the Drawing-room, without carefully waiting for replies, in the way people are apt to interrogate when they think themselves fully informed on a subject.

"Yes, I heard you got home in good time," he exclaimed, "and looked so radiant, as you drove along, that I hope the affair was all pleasure."

"Why, who told you anything about me?" said Catherine, with a languid smile.

"Oh, lots of people recognized you. Still, after such a day, I am almost sorry, my love, that you sat up for me."

"Oh, I am not sleepy, and I have a great deal to tell you. I want your advice, and I want your help."

Thereupon Catherine mentioned Mr. Raybrooke's visit, and the object of it, and how it came to pass that the communication concerning Phœbe had been made to her, instead of to her mother. When she had told the story quite clearly, she added:

"I hope you will agree with me that it was an act of real friendship on his part to tell us what he had seen."

"Well, I suppose it was; and mighty disagreeable to him, I should think."

"Yes, I am sure he felt it so," resumed Catherine; "but then, many things which are kind and wise to do, are, as you say, 'mighty disagreeable.'"

"Rawlins deserves to be kicked!" observed Reuben.

"Metaphorically, yes," said Catherine; "and when my father comes home, he certainly must be informed of the discovery; it would be cruel to distress mamma, just now; at the same time, I may find it difficult to control Phœbe."

"But you can warn her," returned Reuben; "and if, after that, she takes the bit between her teeth, the fault will not be yours."

"Oh, Reuben, do not talk in that way; remember how young she is!"

"Young! She is very nearly as old as you were when we became engaged; and I am afraid a vast deal more knowing than you, Kitty, are ever likely to be. I am sorry to think it of a sister of yours, but I am afraid Phœbe is decidedly fast; and I dare say the consciousness of her independence makes her self-willed. However, speak to her in the morning, and at any rate keep her from seeing the scamp till your father returns."

Then, his mind being very full of the subject, Reuben dilated on the discovery he had made of George Otway being absolutely in England; the chain of evidence was a little intricate, but of the fact there was no doubt, and to him it was an unmitigated satisfaction. He believed himself near the fruition of all his hopes, and that now once and forever he should wipe away all stain from the name of Appersley.

"I would give half my fortune to refute that slander," he said, warming with his own words. "Would not you?"

"Cheerfully," said Catherine, "since I see it is so near your heart to bring the truth to light. And yet—and yet I have an instinct against disturbing the repose of the dead—"

"Yes, yes; you have said all that before," interrupted Reuben, with a touch of irritability in his tone; "but I know thoroughly well what I am about."

"Of course—of course you do," returned Catherine, with all wifelike meekness, "and I am sure I feel as much as you do, that fair fame is only second in value to a pure conscience."

Without any intentional concealment, it did so happen that Catherine never mentioned her fainting fit. Had her husband made more personal inquiries, or been less engrossed with subjects of importance, doubtless she would have named it.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE INDIAN EAR-RINGS.

"NOW, Burton, tell me again exactly what he said, and how he looked, poor fellow!" whispered Phœbe Freeth to the worthless woman who had become her *confidante*. The scene was the young girl's bed-chamber; the time, near midnight,—a day having passed since the events last recorded.

"He said he would write to you under cover to me, miss, and that meanwhile you were to trust in him, as he trusted in you; and to be firm, miss, and to recollect that nobody could force you to give him up, if so be as you wouldn't. Still, he hoped you'd be very careful and cautious not to let them think you much minded, else they'd be leading you a miserable life, and it a-most broke his heart to think you were suffering on account of him."

"Did he say that, the darling? But you tell him, the next time you see him, not to be anxious about me, for I really don't much mind. Only it is provoking to be treated like a child, and watched and suspected. I declare, my eldest sister has hardly let me out of her sight the whole day,—taking me out driving and shopping with her, till she bored me to death. Just because she happens to be married, she thinks she can order and preach ten times more than mamma herself; but I won't stand it, that I won't."

"It is a shame, and that's the truth," said Burton, with mock indignation; "only it would make things a deal more difficult if you did not seem to give way."

"Of course I am not such a fool as not to know that.

But how they can have found out anything, I cannot imagine. However, they are driving me to something,—they are driving me to it, that they are."

"And there was one thing besides which Mr. Rawlins said," continued the woman, who had her reasons for not betraying her own eavesdropping, "that I think I ought to tell you."

"What was it,—what was it?"

"Why, he wanted to know if I would stand by you both faithful, if he got the license,—you understand; if so be he persuaded you to go off, if I would help you to do it."

"And would you, Burton,—would you be faithful to us if we should be driven to that?"

"Yes, that I would. Not that I can see any call to be known to do it. Besides, I can help you a deal better if they don't suspect me any way. And you know, miss, I risk losing a good place all for your sake as it is. If your ma and pa found out that I took messages and letters, I should be ruined—a poor servant has but her character—and if it wasn't that I was fond of you, and felt for you, I wouldn't do it." And here the creature pulled out her handkerchief, and mopped with it the eyes where tears were supposed to stand.

"Burton, you dear, good soul, you shall never lose by being my friend,—that I promise you. So don't be sorry. Never mind my hair tonight; I can manage it myself. Did you hear lately how the children were?"

"Going on all right,—though Master Edward seems now worse with the fever than his sister."

"I am sure I hope I shall not catch it, as he has done; they say people often lose their hair after scarlet fever,—and that would be so dreadful to me."

As Phœbe spoke, she was loosening her tresses tenderly and admiringly. Her hair was very beautiful, and there was certainly some excuse for her solicitude.

"Oh, I don't think you need fear, as you don't go near

the room. I do declare, miss, your hair grows longer and thicker and lovelier every day. I don't wonder at Mr. Rawlins saying it was a net to catch his heart."

"Did he say that? And do lovers always say such pretty things?"

"I am sure, miss, I don't know."

"Well, I should think you must have had lovers. Really, you often look very nice."

At which moderate compliment Burton smiled complacently. But she only said:

"Do, miss, let me put up your hair as usual—I am not a bit tired—and now that you are so lonesome and fretted, I feel more than ever that it's a pleasure to wait upon you."

"Well, be quick then, for I am frightened to death that somebody should be listening or suspecting anything."

"Oh, we have talked very low. I took care of that."

Burton, however, was soon dismissed; for Phœbe's duplicity was of the hard, cunning, remorseless sort, and she felt herself playing a game in which no needless risk must be incurred, no thoughtless act committed, no careless word spoken. She flattered herself that, at present, she had "bamboozled" Catherine, laying at rest all suspicion that the meeting with Cuthbert Rawlins had been preconcerted. Still, she had not discovered the tell-tale friend who had revealed the circumstance, and in this respect she was at a disadvantage.

Surely, a reliable test of what is called love is its influence on the character. Does it purify or corrupt? Does it come as an influx to strengthen truth, and all the kindred virtues, or with Satanic temptations, that break down their barriers? Alas! alas! how seldom will the young learn, except by bitterest experience, that the old are wiser than they, and that the crooked paths of life are full of pitfalls, however pleasant and flower-strewn they may look. Of course, Phœbe Freeth was not a high-toned

girl, or she would not have entered on a clandestine engagement; and yet she is perhaps deserving of a little pity. She had attracted the selfish regard of a clever, unprincipled man while she was only on the threshold of womanhood,—even while in her own home she was treated still as a child. By a sort of instinct she had turned for sympathy to trashy literature, such as, unhappily, is terribly accessible nowadays to all who have a taste for it. All the better lessons she had received—never, it may be, very deeply imprinted—had faded away, till her whole being seemed merged in the one absorbing passion, which hardened her heart, and sharpened her faculties of cunning and deception. The dangerous illness of her young brother and sister scarcely moved her, except as it might affect her own health and beauty; and as for any pangs her disobedience might occasion her parents, she never realized them at all. Sympathy for the sufferings of others withers away in the malign atmosphere of intense selfish self-will. Deceiver she was, but self-deceiver most of all, for she justified her own conduct to herself, taking for argument the fact of her independent fortune.

Late as it was, the unhappy girl was too much excited to be sleepy, and after she had dismissed Burton, she drew forth writing materials, and quickly covered four sides of note-paper. The letter finished and directed, it was for safest keeping put under her pillow; and then she opened a large old-fashioned jewel-box, and took out various ornaments for a leisurely examination. The birthday on which she would be legally entitled to the valuables recently bequeathed to her, was now so near, that she had been allowed to have possession of them. She had been told that they were worth some hundreds of pounds, but she had only a vague idea of the separate value of the articles. The truth was, she wanted to requite Burton's past services, and bribe her for future ones, by some acceptable gift. In this mood she turned over a variety of her treasures.

Rings and bracelets seemed alike unsuitable, while a pearl brooch which Phœbe otherwise felt inclined to bestow, would, she saw, be very unbecoming to Burton's swarthy throat, and she was shrewd enough to know that the way to render the woman grateful, was to give her something which would make her pleased with herself. There was a gold chain,—but then Burton already had one of much newer fashion; a garnet necklace, fifty years old, Phœbe would willingly have spared,—but that would be of no use, she thought, to a servant. Of course, diamonds were too precious—and a variety of other articles were too pretty to part with—so that, with her riches, Phœbe felt the proverbial "embarrassment." However, at last she kept out a curious pair of ear-rings, which she did not particularly admire, but which appeared to her just the thing to bestow. She did not know that their quaintness was a style of oriental workmanship which the *cognoscenti* would have recognized at a glance, and that the half-cut green and red stones—which, beside brighter jewellery, looked a little like sleepy eyes—were, in reality, emeralds and rubies of considerable value.

Laid in a pretty little box, and safely embedded in cotton wool, which set them off immensely, the ear-rings also were placed under Phœbe Freeth's pillow; and after awhile the young girl slept soundly, without even a dream of the net she was weaving,—to entangle and draw into sorrow nobler hearts than her own.

In the upper rooms the fond mother and faithful nurse, Janet, kept watch and ward over the fever-stricken children; and in a near chamber her sister Jane, a little wakeful from loving anxiety, had fitfull dreams of sweet music, and was utterly unconscious of the barrier of concealment which had grown up between Phœbe and herself. Never were two sisters more opposite,—and yet they had been brought up under the same general influences, and had rarely been parted for a day.

In the morning, when, according to custom, Burton entered Phœbe's room, there was a half whispered confidential communication, and both letter and little box passed into the receptacle of Burton's deep pocket.

Many times in the course of that day her fellow servants noticed a certain air of importance, of conscious dignity combined with great affability, for which they could not altogether account. In the afternoon she was "spared" for an hour or two, being suddenly seized with great anxiety about a friend who was in trouble, "otherwise she wouldn't have asked to go out on any account just now, with the dear children so ill." Whatever else she did, she executed Phœbe's commission; and then, on her own account, she had her recent present duly valued, for Hannah Burton was one who always appraised her possessions according to their intrinsic worth. She hated "trumpery," and was incapable of attaching sentiment to a glass bead or a cluster of roses. The judge behind the jeweller's counter—a person to whom she was known—examined the ear-rings with his lens, and tested them with acid, and then pronounced them of almost unalloyed gold, and the gems of purest quality.

"You are certain they are real?" asked the owner.

"Quite certain,—it is the Indian cutting, I see, that makes you doubt. To be sure, they are not everybody's money, and I couldn't pretend to give you what perhaps they are worth. I might keep them for years, you see, till somebody took a fancy to them."

"Oh, I don't want to sell them," replied Burton, "I only wanted to know if they were real, right down good."

"Just so; that was what I understood you to say at first. And you may rest quite sure that they are fit for a duchess to wear."

And after she returned home, Burton was a trifle more dignified and more affable.

CHAPTER XLIII.

HUSBAND AND WIFE COMPARE NOTES.

INCESSANT occupation of mind and body was certainly coincident with the growth of Hubert Freeth's worldly prosperity. It was, in fact, a penalty he paid for his success, though only quite lately had he begun to feel it as such. Often had he been absent from home for weeks at a time, hurried hither and thither hundreds of miles, just to see with his own eyes something no subordinate could quite accurately describe, or to have half an hour's conversation with a provincial magnate, or to take part in some public affair, or attend a scientific gathering, which would have been considered incomplete without his presence. Thus it happened that his absence was prolonged till the little fever-stricken children were pronounced convalescent.

Of course, he had been informed of their illness, which, however, had never been sufficiently alarming to recall him to London, and, when he came home, the usual family routine seemed likely very soon to be restored. It was true that Mrs. Freeth still maintained many quarantine regulations, and not without taking several precautions did she pass the prescribed staircase boundary to greet her husband. Never had she been more glad to welcome him home, and to have her responsibility shared; but never, also, had she been so indifferent to Mr. Freeth's narrative of his business success and much *fêting*. He told her of the manner in which he had been mentioned by a noble chairman, on the occasion of a dinner given in his honor, and of the enthusiasm of a village which greeted him with

waving flags and music, in mark of the gratitude of a population whom his work had made prosperous; but Mrs. Freeth was not stirred, saying little more than, "I am so glad people were kind;" yet the circumstances related gained importance when she observed dates; then she remarked, "Ah, that was the very day Lucy was at the worst, and Dr. Roche came a second time;" or, "That was the night I never slept at all,—when poor Teddy was delirious."

Hubert Freeth smiled on his wife, but with great tenderness; he loved his children dearly, and was the sort of a man that, had circumstances demanded it, could have personally tended them in their illness, perhaps as devotedly as their mother had done. But no such need had arisen, and he recognized, with a sort of grateful approval, the division of their duties, even though his wife did seem careless of his triumphs. It even passed through his mind that, if his Bessie had been what is called a "strong-minded woman," craving much mental excitement, she might have desired to be his companion on the recent journey, to listen to speeches in his honor, and share the homage he had received. And then what might not have happened to the children in her absence!

To be sure, he would have liked her to show a shade more sympathy with those pursuits which were the main objects of his thoughts; to express herself, perhaps, as emphatically as Mrs. Brindley invariably did on the subject of his engineering triumphs; but, then, it flashed through his mind that Mrs. Brindley was much the sort of woman to have become "strong-minded," had circumstances favored her development in that direction. Fortunately for Mrs. Freeth, when contrasted with that class of women, she always appeared to her husband in the most favorable light.

And yet, and yet she had her "silent sorrow," of which the world knew nothing. It was true that many of

her acquaintances had remarked that she was looking worn and old, and people do not age before their time without a reason. But, except of her failing sight, she did not complain. A thorough woman, with the true humility that belongs to such a character, she also had that strong yearning for consideration and esteem which is no less a feminine attribute. And if this union seem a paradox, it is a thin-shelled paradox, with a great kernel of truth and fact. Of course, she did receive much consideration, and won much esteem from her friends and acquaintances; but, diffident of her own merits, she laid it all to the account that she was Hubert Freeth's wife. This was no pain to her—rather was it a justifiable pride—but, oh, her heart ached and pined for words of praise and love from her husband's lips! Such words as, in the days of obscurity and narrow means, had seemed to be rich music, that told of hope and joy; that lightened care, and bid the sunshine stream in around her. Was it, she asked herself, that he had now no time for consideration of such trifles as her pursuits and inclinations, or was it that, brought into comparison with more accomplished and fascinating women, she had sunk to a lower level than formerly in his estimation? Whenever she inclined to the latter opinion, the demon of jealousy was very near, in readiness to torment and tempt her.

It was a mournful proof of the invisible barrier which had grown up between them, that Hubert Freeth had not the remotest idea of the source of his wife's discontent,—a discontent which was sometimes, though not often, apparent. He did not seem to understand how a woman, surrounded by every earthly comfort, could still want something which no money could bestow. She wanted the glad look, the pet names, the indescribable, minute evidences that she was the first object of her husband's regard. Strange that, through the long years of struggles and poverty, the light of that belief had never waned;

but the conflict of feelings which had latterly sprung up raised a mental mist, which made her see many things in a distorted form, so that she had grown to think her Hubert's professional success and the world's applause were her own formidable rivals.

"It is a most unlucky thing to have happened just in the height of the season," observed Hubert Freeth, when he had listened to the details of his children's illness. "People don't like coming to a pest-house; and I sadly want to give three or four dinner-parties. Don't you think they are well enough to be packed off to Brighton or Hastings? and then we might have the whole house properly disinfected."

"Not yet awhile, I am sure," said his wife; "and oh, Hubert," she continued, "it does seem so hard for me to be sent away directly you come back."

"My dear, I am not sending you away. Surely you could trust two little children with Janet."

"If I could trust them with any one after such an illness, of course it would be Janet," replied Mrs. Freeth, with a sigh; "but I cannot bear the thought at all. It seems so hard not to have you and the poor children together. I declare, it is just like the ladies in India, who have to send away their children, or part from their husbands."

"A very mild imitation of their trial!" exclaimed Mr. Freeth, with a smile, not altogether displeased at his wife's reluctance to leave him; "but really, Bessie, there is not the least occasion for you to go away. Teddy and Lucy dote upon their old nurse, and would be quite happy with her."

"Yes, quite happy; but I think it is too great a responsibility to put upon her. Oh, those horrid dinner-parties! they are always in the way of something or another."

"It seems to me, something or other is always in the

way of the dinner-parties," retorted Mr. Freeth; "but I must have them, nevertheless."

"If you say so, of course you must."

Unhappily, temper was rising in both; but Hubert Freeth had good feeling enough to make large allowance for the strain of anxiety and want of rest through which his wife had lately passed, and considered that the best way of pouring oil upon the troubled waters was altogether to change the conversation.

"By the bye," he exclaimed, "have you seen much of Raybrooke since I have been away?"

"He was here about a fortnight ago,—yes, it was the day Catherine went to Court, and the day the dear children became seriously ill. Of course I did not see him. He has inquired at the door several times, and sent his servant often, but has never really made a visit since. He couldn't be hurt at my not seeing him, under the circumstances."

"Oh, of course not. But I expect by this time our friend is Sir Algernon; I heard yesterday that Sir Richard had had a fatal seizure, and was really on the point of death."

"Then, besides being a baronet, he will come into a great fortune, will he not?" said Mrs. Freeth.

"I believe so."

"I am so glad," returned Mrs. Freeth, "for I like him very much. That is to say," she continued, with a sigh, and as if from an afterthought, "I am glad if the great fortune makes him happy. I don't think money brings happiness in all cases."

"Oh, Raybrooke will like the fortune, never fear," cried Mr. Freeth.

"I dare say he will; and I should think he would be sure to marry," continued the lady. "He is so gentlemanly, and so clever, and so nice altogether, that he will be what people call a capital match."

"If only Phœbe and Jane were a little older," said Mr. Freeth laughing, "I should accuse you of having designs, and being a match-maker."

"Oh, Hubert, how can you say such a thing! I would not be a match-maker for all the world. And it would be horrid to put any such idea into the heads of mere children. Though, really, for that matter—"

"Jane is about the age," exclaimed Hubert Freeth, "that you were when we engaged ourselves, and Phœbe a few months younger than you were when we married. I did not remember our own courtship at the moment."

"That was not at all what I was going to say," remarked Mrs. Freeth gravely. "I was going to tell you a little trouble in connection with Phœbe. I cannot say I have seen anything myself, but Catherine is of opinion that that good-for-nothing Mr. Rawlins has been talking nonsense to her; in fact, that something very like flirtation was going on while I was away."

"Oh, but that is very serious, for the fellow is a thorough scoundrel. I thought he was forbidden the house."

"Yes, we have been denied to him ever since you said he must not be admitted; but I believe he was here many times while I was at Five Oaks. I don't exactly know what Catherine fears, or what she may have found out through the Brindleys, for she seemed very disinclined to worry me about the affair; only I know she suspects something."

"I should like to speak to Catherine on the subject," cried Hubert Freeth; "she must have some reason for her suspicion. No power on earth would make me consent to a daughter's marriage with such a man. And that godmother's fortune, if it got wind, might make her a prey to the hawks of society; we really must take care of the girl."

"Catherine has taken great care of her, I assure you; going everywhere with her all the time I have been nursing the poor children. But Phœbe is not easy to manage;

that I found out long ago; and since she has known about the fortune, she has shown a will of her own more than ever."

"Confound the fortune, if it is to make her headstrong and disobedient," said Mr. Freeth, with emphasis, and even agitation; "but, after all, we may be distressing ourselves unnecessarily. I cannot believe that one of our daughters would deceive us; it would be a bitterness indeed to think it. In my opinion, the best plan will be to ignore the thing altogether. Keep the girl to her studies, and give her some amusement, and then, if she has any silly ideas in her head, they will get driven out."

"That is just what I think," replied the wife, "only I felt I must tell you what had passed."

"Quite right, quite right."

"Catherine has proposed taking Phœbe with her to Five Oaks, when she goes home," continued Mrs. Freeth; "but I cannot say Phœbe is much pleased at the invitation."

"If Catherine will have her for a month or two, it will be the best arrangement under the circumstances."

"Oh, how I wish we had never known that bad young man!" sighed Mrs. Freeth.

"I dare say we never should have known him if Lionel had been drowned in the Cam."

"Oh, Hubert, how can you talk so! But if Lionel had never gone to Cambridge, he would not have had that boat accident."

"True; but if we track back in that manner, where are we to stop?"

"But, Hubert," pursued the mother, "are you satisfied with him now,—is he getting on at last?"

"Well, yes, I hope,—I think he is. And there is very little excuse for him if he disappoints us. I declare, grown-up children seem as much anxiety as the babies!"

"And yet how we used to talk of our hopes of seeing them grown up; it seemed the only thing to live for!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

JENNY CANNOT BE TREATED AS A CHILD ANY LONGER.

THREE weeks had passed rapidly away. The invalid children had been "packed off" to Hastings, in charge of the old nurse, Janet Gillespie; Telford House had been thoroughly disinfected, and the "horrid" dinner-parties had been given; the London season had culminated, and though Reuben Appersley would remain in town for awhile, his wife was planning a more speedy return home. It was arranged, also, that her sister Phœbe was to accompany Catherine to Five Oaks, and be her guest for at least a few weeks. The young girl now talked as if she were pleased with the project, and practised dissimulation so well that no one suspected the extent of her deception.

It was an hour or so after breakfast, one of those delicious June mornings, when, even in the heart of London, we are swayed by the glory of summer, and when "sensitives" must, indeed, be bowed down with care, if they do not feel exhilarated and almost happy in mere existence. Mrs. Freeth was busy about household arrangements; Reuben taking a solitary, late breakfast; Jane was practising a duet with Miss Otway; Phœbe was reading, or seeming to read, and Catherine was writing to her mother-in-law a full and particular account of various small events which she knew would interest her; Hubert Freeth had opened his letters and read the "Times," and it was nearly the hour when he usually started for his office. Nearly, but not quite, for Mr. Freeth was very methodical in his habits —perhaps it was the secret of his great working power—

and any one intimately acquainted with the ways of the house would have known that this was just the moment in the four-and-twenty hours when he would be most likely to be found at home and disengaged. Therefore, the visitor who now sent in his card, and was subsequently ushered into the pleasant library, was, at any rate, fortunate, if, as from his manner appeared to be the case, it was the master of the house he especially wished to see.

This unexpected visitor, much grown in manliness, grown even somewhat in stature, since we knew him first as a young midshipman, was Lieutenant Raybrooke, brother of the new baronet, Sir Algernon. Already he had won the character of a brave and clever and zealous officer; yet, as he crossed the threshold of that room, he felt something which, to his own heart, he called cowardice. His voice actually trembled as he asked pardon for his intrusion at so early an hour; then, when Hubert Freeth endeavored, good naturedly, to put him at his ease, he faltered in his set speech, and, finally, with real abruptness, made it understood that he came to offer his hand and heart to Jane Freeth, and to seek her father's sanction to pleading his cause.

Mr. Freeth was absolutely astounded. It is true that only the other day he had begun to see that his young daughters were no longer children; but the idea of his little Jenny, not yet seventeen, being wooed in this earnest and highly orthodox manner, was something strange and startling—even a little comic.

"Pardon me," exclaimed Mr. Freeth, "if I know not what to say. She is such a child,—can never have thought of marriage, I am sure."

"I, too, am young," said Frank Raybrooke, "and I do not ask to be married immediately. In fact, my brother thinks we ought to wait a year or two."

"I am glad to hear your brother knows of this

attachment," said Mr. Freeth; "for, as you yourself say, you are very young."

"Oh, yes; Algernon not only knows of my attachment, but I have his best wishes for my success. I have even a message from him; but I hate talking of money."

"It is sometimes necessary to speak of it," said Mr. Freeth. "I cannot pretend to make objection to yourself, or your family, or your noble profession—though it has its pains and penalties—but I will be frank with you, and say I wish affluence for my children."

"My kind brother has foreseen that very natural wish. Certain deeds are now in preparation by which he makes over to me quite two thousand a year. I have, besides, a patrimony of a few hundreds a year; and I trust to rise in the navy. I hope you will not think I am altogether impertinent in my proposal."

"Impertinent! Certainly not; and it would ill become me," said Mr. Freeth, "to treat your proposal other than quite seriously. But do you know that Jenny is not yet seventeen; that she is still under the care of a governess? Why, I hear what the girls call "practising," not playing, going on at this moment! It makes me smile at the position, I assure you."

"I know she is very young; but I will wait a year, or two, if you wish it. All I ask at present is, that I may have opportunities to try and win her love."

"Had you not better delay this step a little longer?" said Mr. Freeth; "till you are sure that your regard is something more than a boyish fancy."

"It *was* a boyish fancy a year ago," replied the suitor, with some dignity; "it is a man's strong love now. I have to leave England on a long cruise in a few weeks, and I want to plead my cause at once,—today, if you will let me."

Hubert Freeth had had many a surprise in his life, but hardly ever so great a one as the present. To the end of

time I suppose parents will be astonished, and wake as it were with a start, when they find that their children have passed out of the charmed circle of dependence, and stepped forward to take their places in the foremost files of life. Even though theoretically the parents are ready to admit that childhood is past, they do not quite realize the fact till events loudly and undeniably proclaim it.

Mr. Freeth did not answer Frank Raybrooke's last words very promptly. But after a few moments he said, "Then you really wish to see my daughter today?"

"Indeed—indeed I do."

"But I must speak to her mother, and we must prepare her."

"Oh, pray plead for me with Mrs. Freeth," exclaimed the young man, "if she raises objections! But Algernon says she is all goodness and kindness, and I hope I need not fear opposition from her."

"I should like to speak to her privately," said Mr. Freeth, "and prepare my wife for this little surprise; so perhaps you will amuse yourself with the newspapers for a quarter of an hour, if I leave you."

"I will try," said Frank with a smile; "but as you are mighty be merciful, and remember my suspense."

If Mr. Freeth had been "astounded" by Frank Raybrooke's proposal, some yet stronger and superlative word is needed to express his wife's astonishment when the circumstance, with all its details, was made known to her. Yet she was not stricken dumb, as it is popularly supposed people are by surprises; on the contrary, she became decidedly voluble, though chiefly in the interjectional manner.

"Jenny—our Jenny, really such a child! I feel inclined to rub my eyes to make sure I am not dreaming. But she is too young—much too young to think of such a thing; it will only unsettle her, and yet—and yet it is what every one would call an excellent match—"

"That is just what I feel; after all, many a girl has married at seventeen, and done very well too; and besides, there is no talk of an immediate marriage. I believe you had better speak to Jenny, and then, if she consents to see him, why, I will ask him to dinner, and he can come an hour before the time, if he likes. Luckily, we shall be quite alone."

And on this mission Mrs. Freeth entered the drawing-room, and interrupted the "practising." How she broke the tidings she had to tell is not precisely recorded; but in less than ten minutes Mrs. Freeth returned to her husband in a state of even heightened astonishment.

"Oh, Hubert," she exclaimed, "we cannot treat Jenny as a child any longer! Of course she is going to accept this young man."

"Why, what did she say?"

"Very little. At first she turned pale, then flushed to crimson; and when I drew her toward me, she burst into tears, and buried her face on my bosom. Of course I told her everything you said; and the long and the short is, that she will see this Frank Raybrooke whenever we like. Really, if she had been twenty, she could not have behaved better. Though agitated, as I have told you, at first, she soon became composed, and even dignified, with something of Catherine's grand manner."

"I have often thought her like Catherine," observed Mr. Freeth.

"Yes, I know you have said so; but I never saw it till today. She is a little like her, certainly, and a darling child; but she will never be quite so handsome as her sister."

"I don't know; wait till she is twenty before quite deciding that question."

"Well, Hubert, what are we to say to this young man? I suppose I ought to see him?"

"Yes, certainly; and I think the best plan will be for

you to take him upstairs to Jane without more ado. It is better to get the first interview over at once, instead of keeping the girl in a state of agitation for hours. But mind you, I will not have a positive engagement just yet; they are much too young. Only—as really there is no objection to make—we must let him see her. But women can manage such matters better than a man. I will just go and tell him that he is left in your hands. And then I must instantly be off. I have an appointment at the office, and ought to be there already."

Years have passed since that bright June day; but the memory of it is still fresh in many hearts. To the young lovers it was indeed a day of days, of which each hour had its own beautiful stirring history, that made a picture on the mind in all the radiant colors that love can borrow from youth and hope, and which neither time nor circumstance can obliterate.

Mrs. Freeth arranged the interview between the young people with much propriety and yet consideration, and then relieved her own feelings by telling Catherine and Miss Otway all that had happened. Reuben and Phœbe were also enlightened, and really, before luncheon time, affairs had gone so fast, that Jenny's new position seemed a recognized fact by all the family. Of course the young sailor remained for that sociable meal, for they could not tell him to go when the gong sounded; and of course he accepted the invitation to dinner, not tearing himself away to write to his brother—who was just now at Raybrooke Park—until late in the afternoon.

Hubert Freeth came home earlier than usual that day. The event of the morning was decidedly uppermost in his mind, so for once he left as much work as he possibly could to subordinates. He soon perceived that all the family were aware of what had happened, but it was from his wife that he heard little details.

"Really, Hubert," she said, "it seems like a dream."

"My dear, you often make that observation," interrupted Mr. Freeth, who was a good deal more fastidious about his wife's little mannerisms than he was about the stock phrases of other people.

"Do I?" she replied; "well, at any rate, you know what I mean by it. All this has come upon us like a thunderbolt, yet I declare to you to see those two young things together, you would think they had been engaged for three months at the very least."

"But I told you, Bessie, that I would not have a positive engagement."

"It is easy to talk in that way," replied the lady; "but I should like to know what you call a positive engagement. When I spoke seriously to Jane on that subject, she looked me full in the face, half laughing and half crying, and said, with a sort of mock gravity, 'Dear mamma, if Frank likes to marry anybody else, he may; and I am sure if I change my mind, I shall say so. I hope papa will be satisfied with that arrangement.' Now, Hubert, could you have made any answer to that?"

"Upon my word, I don't know," said Mr. Freeth, laughing; "but, really, they seem to be having it all their own way."

"But their own way is nothing to object to, after all. And do you know he wants us all to go down to Portsmouth, that he may show us over his ship, and give us luncheon on board."

"Well, you can go if you like."

"Hark! there is a double knock and ring," exclaimed Mrs. Freeth. "How late it is for visitors,—and I have got to dress for dinner."

"Perhaps it is young Raybrooke, come an hour before the time," said the husband, laughing; and his guess was right.

Frank was shown into the drawing-room, which was tenantless, save that to him it was filled with happy mem-

ories, from the night of the children's party until now. At the antipodes he had remembered that room, and under the scorching sun of the tropics, he had thought of its pleasant shade, and the one dear face associated with it. No outward thing was changed, only his heart seemed to have expanded, and to have become capable of receiving unbounded happiness.

One by one the ladies of the family came down "dressed for dinner," Phœbe being the first who made her appearance. In fact, she rather hurried her toilet when she heard accidentally that Frank had arrived, expressing an anxious desire to see her brother-in-law that was to be.

Phœbe and Jane usually dressed precisely alike, and today they wore a pretty light fabric suited to the season. But Jane was, perhaps, a little too nervous to dress quickly, or else a little too shy to enter the drawing-room prematurely. If Phœbe had really the design of preventing a *tête-à-tête* between the lovers, she might have spared herself the trouble, for Catherine was in the drawing-room long before Jane appeared. Jenny's simple toilet was either very becoming, or the heart's awakening had called into life some hidden germs of beauty, for never had she looked so radiant. And kind and loving hearts could not help but bask in the reflected rays of youthful happiness.

As for Frank, not being the least ashamed of his love, and not seeing why in the present select family circle he should hide it, he hung over the back of the low chair in which Jane was seated, without any remorse, and brought his lips within six inches of her ear, without really seeming to be guilty of the vulgarity of whispering. Also, there must have been a singular unobserved feat of *legerdemain* executed during the preprandial half hour, for when Jenny sat down to dinner she wore a beautiful ring set with turquoise and diamonds, that had never been seen before.

Truly, the next few weeks were a Paradisiacal time to the youthful lovers, when all the threads of life seemed

gathered up into "one knot of happiness." Oh, how false, how utterly a lie to the core, is that theory that mystery and concealment, difficulties and opposition, give zest to an attachment! Why, they are the trail of the serpent, which blights and withers the fairest buds of promise.

No, it is when friends approve, and conscience at every point is satisfied, that the fresh pure love of two young hearts creates an Eden, sanctifying the common things of life, and raising little joys to ecstasy. As ditch water to the fabled nectar was that something which Phœbe had tasted and called love, in comparison with the heart union—of which they were neither ashamed nor afraid—which bound Jane Freeth and Frank Raybrooke in bonds from which there was to be no earthly divorce.

CHAPTER XLV.

PHŒBE AND JANE.

THE excursion to Portsmouth duly took place, all the ladies of the Freeth family, and Gilbert, now at home for the holidays, being of the party. The weather was perfect, and railway trains fitting in charmingly with all desired arrangements, the day was essentially one of pleasure, without even Mrs. Freeth experiencing overpowering fatigue. But we know that to the jaundiced eye all things are discolored, and, in like manner, to the diseased mind's eye fair sights seem foul. Perhaps no evil passion is more capable of distorting the mental vision than that vice of ignoble souls,—envy; coupled, as it generally is, with selfish and wounded vanity; and the wretched girl, Phœbe Freeth, was too much corrupted by self-will, self-love, and a course of deception, to feel any reflected rays, —to take any real pleasure in the happiness of another, though even that other were her own young sister.

In truth, Phœbe had become a most accomplished hypocrite, aided not a little in her downward career by the subtle influence of the worthless woman, Burton, to whom, by very slow degrees, she had absolutely grown to look up for guidance and advice. Evil doing yokes us with companions more "strange" and terrible than unprovoked "adversity" ever encounters, and the moral deterioration which had ensued to Phœbe from her making a confidante and companion of such an arch-traitress was simply incalculable.

The little party had arrived in London, from Ports-

mouth, between eight and nine o'clock in the evening, and Phœbe, pleading fatigue and sleepiness, retired at once to her room. In reality, she was longing to see Burton, to ascertain if there were any secret message or letter for her, and to pour out in speech to a sympathizing listener some of her pent-up feelings.

"There, shut the door!" she exclaimed, as the woman followed her into the room, ostensibly to help her off with her mantle and put away her hat. "Oh, I am so glad to be at home again! I never was so sick of anything in my life. But tell me, have you seen *him* today, or is there any letter for me?" she added, dropping her voice almost to a whisper.

"Yes, miss, that is why I came up without waiting for you to ring," replied the woman, drawing a letter from her pocket. "I thought you would like to have it at once."

"That was right and kind of you," said the young girl, opening the letter eagerly. "What should I do without you? I don't feel there is another soul I can trust."

"La, miss! But I am sure it is the greatest pleasure to serve you."

The letter, though apparently satisfactory, was but short; so that Phœbe's perusal of it scarcely interrupted the dialogue, and Burton continued:

"I think, though, you are quite right not to trust any one. Parents have such awful power over their children who are not of age."

"The laws are shameful, and ought to be altered," cried Phœbe, with the utmost gravity; "it is horrible tyranny, forbidding the banns and refusing a license,—and all the rest of it. And then pretending one is not old enough to judge for one's self,—such rubbish! Why, there is a proof at this very time, in our own family, that age has nothing to do with it, if only we happen to like somebody with plenty of money."

"You may say that, I am sure," said Burton.

"I hope I shall never pass such another day as today has been," continued Phœbe; "to see one's own younger sister made such a ridiculous fuss about, and treated with a sort of dignity as an engaged girl, was really enough to provoke any one. A chit like that to be treated like a sort of queen, everybody thanking *her* lover for the charming day they had had, and knowing it was on her account it had all been done,—grand luncheon on board, and everything. Only that I happened to be downright hungry, or I think I should have choked."

"Don't you fret; you are an engaged young lady too, and with a much nicer lover, in my opinion. Besides, sailors are so fickle; perhaps he'll break her heart yet. I don't know any one like Mr. Rawlins, that I don't, and he's such a kind gentleman. It's a cruel, horrid shame that he should have enemies who set people against him."

"Even my brother Lionel, whose life he saved, never sees him or writes to him now. Such ingratitude! But it only makes me more indifferent to my own family. When I do take *the step*, there will be very little to regret. Meanwhile, you dear good soul, I know you will do all you can for me. As for ever seeing him again, till I go to him for good, I don't believe I shall, for they all watch me as a cat watches a mouse; and I am worn out and miserable from having to be always on my guard. It would be so nice to be able to talk to other people as I talk to you; but I feel that I dare not trust any one."

"You had better not, indeed you had better not," cried Burton, in a tone that a little betrayed her alarm at the mere suggestion.

"I know that; I felt my way just ever so little one day with Mrs. Brindley, talking about the control of parents, and marrying for love, and so on, and I found it would not do. Once, I thought she might have helped us, for I am sure, when she was keeping house here, she

did everything to encourage him. But I understand it all now."

"Do you really?" said Burton.

"Yes; once I fancied she would have liked Lionel to fall in love with her daughter, but, latterly, I think she has had grander notions; and she had heard Mr. Rawlins was connected with the nobility, and she did not know of his troubles; and my belief is, that she thought at first it was Aline he came to see."

"Mr. Rawlins had better taste."

"Now, Burton, don't you pay compliments."

"I am sure, Miss Phœbe, I am only saying what I think."

"Well, well, there is no denying Miss Brindley is an attractive girl,—all the more ought I to be grateful for being preferred. And then he is so well connected, he might really have looked much higher. I can see that mamma and papa think ever so much of the brother of a baronet, and yet they despise Mr. Rawlins, who is own cousin to an earl. People are so inconsistent."

"It is one comfort, Miss Phœbe, that your present life is not going to last forever."

"You may say that; for I am heartily sick of the tyranny with which I am treated. But the tables will be turned when Mr. Rawlins gets an appointment—and perhaps he will be made an ambassador, or something—and then I shall go to Court as a much greater lady than either of my sisters."

"And you would look it, too."

"That is not the question. But, meanwhile, it is a miserable time. Once, I thought it might have been safe to tell Miss Brindley, and she could have helped me so much."

"Could she?"

"Oh, yes, many ways. But I found she had heard the cruel stories about Mr. Rawlins, and quite believed

them. She even defended Lionel's gratitude quite warmly. So, after that, I felt she was dangerous."

"I should think so," exclaimed Burton, with emphasis. "But," she continued, "don't you think, miss, I had better go now,—for fear I should be wanted, and for fear it should look suspicious like, my staying so long?"

"Quite right, quite right. Only you might say, what is the truth, that I should like some tea and bread and butter. But ask mamma to let you bring it to me, and then I can talk to you about the packing up, which ought to begin soon. It will only seem, you know, that I am arranging to go to Five Oaks; so far, the idea of that visit is lucky,—it will account for my sorting out things. And if my relations make me deceitful, it's not my fault; now is it?"

"Surely not. They bring it upon themselves, that's what I think. But I'll soon be back with the tea. As you say, miss, it's time to make up your mind what you'll take, and what you'll leave. I've bought a lovely trunk, just what you meant today; and who's to know, when I send it away, as it will appear to a friend of mine in the country, who's to know, I say, where it goes or what it contains?"

"Oh, Burton! how clever you are! you think of everything."

Like passing from some foul and noxious atmosphere to the breath of a flower-garden, or from the din and jingle of discordant noises to the soul-soothing influence of sweet music, is the thought-travelling which takes us away from the vile plotting of Phœbe Freeth and her evil counsellor, to the presence of "little Jenny," as the young sailor's betrothed is still often and rather ridiculously called. For she has reached at least the medium height of woman, and every week that has latterly passed, has seemed to fling round her some new womanly grace.

The crimson glory of the sunset had faded away into

harmony with the deepening twilight; but the evening was so lovely, that Mrs. Freeth, with Kate and Jane, declined having lights in the drawing-room. They had just finished taking their refreshing tea, and were now seated near an open window, chatting about the incidents of their pleasant day. Jenny was on a stool at her mother's feet, but leaning her head rather luxuriously on Mrs. Freeth's lap. Catherine was so near that their hands easily met, and more than once, when the conversation was very earnest, the elder sister clasped the young girl's fingers caressingly, and in token of sympathy.

The street-lamps cast a little light into the room, but still it was quite dusk,—too dusk to trace any expression on Jenny's face; yet the tones of her voice conveyed all needful assurance to her mother and sister, and, as it fell on their ears, made their hearts glad in her happiness.

"Oh, mamma," she exclaimed, "what a wonderful world it is, and what happiness there is in it! But that I should be so happy,—that is the surprise. Oh, how good God is to me!" and the voice suggested that tears, true tears of grateful joy, were almost ready to flow.

"Do you know," she continued, "if there were not the little trial of Frank going away, I should be almost frightened at being so happy. Don't laugh, dear mamma, at what I say; it is really not all nonsense. I should feel that something horrible and dreadful must happen to break the spell."

"Well, my dear," replied Mrs. Freeth, "it is a great comfort that you are not going to grieve about his sailing."

"Oh, I don't quite promise that."

"Don't you? Then I hardly know what you mean. But I do know, Jenny dear, that it makes me very happy to see you so contented with your choice; and the more I see of the young man, the more I like him."

"Please, mamma, say 'love.' I should like to hear you say you loved him."

"Well, I dare say I shall love him in time."

"Do try. You would at once, if you half knew how good he is. Couldn't you see today how he was adored by everybody?"

"I think he is very much liked by his captain and the other officers," replied Mrs. Freeth, with a smile; "but 'adored' is rather a strong word."

"Perhaps it is," cried the young girl, laughing; "but a weak word would not express what I feel and think. Now, mamma, did not you notice, when he was showing us over the ship, how the common sailors spoke to him?"

"My dear, their manner was only that of proper respect and obedience."

"Mamma, I shall have to pinch you, if you talk in that way. It is my ear for music, I suppose; but if I were blind, I should know all about people by their voices; and I am certain every one of those men we spoke to had real affection for Frank. Oh, I did feel so proud of him! and though, at first, I rather dreaded seeing so many people and had made up my mind to be so careful that they should not suspect anything, I am afraid I got off my guard. Now, Kate, you were with me more even than mamma was,—do you think anything was noticed?"

"Not disagreeably so, I am sure," replied Catherine; "but you and the lieutenant are not skilful hypocrites—"

"Oh, call him Frank," interrupted Jenny.

"Well, you and Frank not being skilful hypocrites, did behave a little as if you preferred each other to any one else. Or, rather, I should say, he looked the lover. Don't distress yourself, Jenny; you behaved quite properly. In my opinion, the affectation of indifference, in your position, is just as detestable as the other extreme."

"Darling Kate, to say that!" cried Jane, with a tight squeeze of her sister's hand; "and, after all, why should I be ashamed?"

"Why, indeed!"

"Only it is not pleasant to be noticed, and, perhaps, criticised, with a sort of wonder what he can see in me. But I'll try not to mind. Poor fellow! he is to be but a week longer in London before he sails. His brother is coming up from Raybrooke Park to wish him good-by."

CHAPTER XLVI.

A PARTING.

IN three days Catherine was to return to Five Oaks, and about the same time Frank Raybrooke was expected to take leave of his betrothed, and finally join his ship, now under orders to sail for the United States of America. His brother was also in London, and, under all the circumstances of the projected alliance, nothing seemed more natural than for the Freeths to make up "a family dinner-party." The new baronet appeared to have been excessively engaged, for he had not yet found an opportunity of calling at Telford House; but he had taken care that the omission might not appear a slight, by sending a great many messages of apology, and writing a most cordial and gratifying letter to Mr. Freeth on the occasion of Frank's engagement. However, he accepted the invitation to the hurriedly-arranged little party, and, at the appointed hour, duly presented himself.

Yes, though he had made personal inquiries at the door during the illness of the children, and had sent many messages, Algernon had never entered the house since that fateful day when Catherine had fainted in his presence. It was true that the death of Sir Richard Raybrooke, by which he inherited title and fortune, had given him much business occupation, and called him away from London for a time; but Algernon was essentially a man who, if he had had the will to call, would have found the way. This coming to dinner was a thing which, for his brother's sake, and for general appearance' sake, had to be done; but Algernon

had made certain determined resolutions, which were not at all likely to be broken in the future.

Old Uncle Thomas had consented to be of the party when he understood it was to be strictly a family affair, "just the Raybrookes and themselves," and "no evening party afterward;" assurances which had been drawn forth by the old man's queries. Jane was somewhat his pet, and he was really anxious to judge for himself of her intended husband.

At dinner, Jane sat between the two brothers, old Mr. Freeth and Catherine being their *vis-à-vis*. Algernon's change of style and title a little confused Mrs. Freeth; more than once she called him Mr. Raybrooke, as of old, and then apologized for her mistake.

"Do call me only Algernon," he exclaimed; "I assure you I have not got used to the prefix myself yet, and I have no wish to hear it from you, dear Mrs. Freeth, or any of your family. Lady Hartrington is the only woman that has ever called me simply by my Christian name since my poor mother died, and now I come to think of it, I believe that is one of the reasons I am so fond of her."

It was a natural enough thing among intimate friends to say, but the Freeths all felt that Algernon wished them to accept him already as a "family connection." It was altogether a pleasant and even merry meeting. The old uncle was in great force, and full of anecdotes of by-gone day sand by-gone personages, and the young people present, more especially those just opposite to him, seemed excellent and interested listeners. He remembered having met Algernon on a former occasion, and seemed aware of his intimacy with the family, and perhaps it struck him as a little curious that it should have been the younger brother, the comparative stranger, who had fallen "over head and ears" in love with little Jenny. He did not much wonder at her having been preferred to Phœbe; for though the latter was the more strictly handsome of the two, there

was a winning grace, a fearless frankness—quite unallied to boldness—about Jenny that was especially captivating. Boldness and shyness both spring from excessive self-consciousness, and it is the happy medium in manner which generally shows the unselfish, well-balanced character.

In the course of conversation, some allusion was made to Frank's speedy departure, and then Algernon a little surprised them all—except Catherine—by saying that he should accompany his brother.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "I am really going. Frank's captain has invited me to cross the Atlantic as his guest, and the opportunity is too tempting a one to be lost."

"Shall you make a long stay in America?" asked the old man.

"Ah, that is just what I can't tell," replied Algernon; "and yet I suppose I must stay long enough to see the cities, and see the sights, and know the people best worth seeing and knowing."

"Then that means a sojourn of years," exclaimed the old man; "and as a septuagenarian, perhaps I ought not to expect to be here on your return. And yet I should like to hear your account of the Great Republic,—the great experiment in modern history."

"Our friend will perhaps write a book about his travels," observed Hubert Freeth.

"There is no knowing what follies a man may be tempted to commit," replied Algernon; "but unless I feel that I have something to say which has not already been better said than I can say it, I will refrain from pen and ink. Besides that, taking notes with all the malice prepense of intending to use them, destroys half one's pleasure. And, after all, there have been so many books written about America, that it seems almost as much used up as Rome and Naples."

"Not quite," said old Mr. Freeth; "there is this great difference,—that the past of Italy is so great and so daz-

zling, that modern aspects are dwarfed by comparison; whereas America seems always expanding,—always offering new combinations and astonishing results to the thoughtful observer. Ah, I wish I were a dozen years younger; then I too would cross the Atlantic, and judge of things for myself!"

"And what a reception, uncle, you would have!" exclaimed their host.

"Ah, I have many good friends and correspondents in the States; and this reminds me,—would you, Sir Algernon, like some letters of introduction?"

"Oh, very much indeed!" replied Raybrooke. "I was just wishing for something of the kind. There is certainly one advantage in having no ties,—I can go just where I please; and I mean to see everything,—even to go among the Red Indians, if possible. I dare say I shall be away for years."

"A time will come," said Hubert Freeth, "when you will grow tired of roving, and want to settle down again in Old England."

"Well, it may be so," answered Algernon; "one never can tell. And, by the bye, there is something I wanted to say. If any of you would like some shooting next autumn, do go down to Raybrooke. The place is not by any means shut up. Poor old Lady Raybrooke is staying there for the present; but she occupies her own apartments, and, in fact, is too great an invalid to do the honors. The servants, however, would get rooms ready at a day or two's notice, and I should so like you all to know the place. There are some curious old pictures that might interest you, if you care to notice how likenesses crop out. There is one of an ancestor, who fell in the civil wars, that looks like Frank in masquerade."

Then speaking in an undertone to Jane, he said, "I'll have it photographed for you. I think you would like to have it."

Jenny colored a little, but she had accepted her position, and thanked Algernon for his intended gift, naturally and sincerely. Altogether, it was a sociable meeting, in which the ties of acquaintanceship and friendship seemed drawn perceptibly closer. In the drawing-room, after dinner, Reuben started some political subject to Algernon, on which, for a wonder, they agreed; and on the strength of this accordance, he uttered a hearty wish that Raybrooke were in Parliament, and on his side of the House.

"Time works wonders," said Hubert Freeth jocosely; "at any rate, when our friend does return home, I hope he will resume his political career,—it is the right thing for a young man in his position."

"As you say, 'time works wonders,'" returned Algernon; "and it would be one of the pleasantest things in life to find myself coöperating with Mr. Appersley. But I don't see my way to ratting just yet, and I am afraid Appersley is too stanch in his views to come round to mine."

"Phœbe, what is the matter with you?" asked the old uncle, who was ever a privileged person, accustomed to say anything he liked. "I declare, you have scarcely opened your lips all the evening," he continued. "What is the matter, I say?"

"Oh, nothing is the matter. I should have talked if I had had anything to say," replied the girl; but there was a certain confusion in her manner which was not unnoticed by the shrewd old man.

"Nothing to say! Why, you used to be always a ready chatterbox. I declare, I should have thought you were the engaged young lady, instead of Jane. Don't give way too much to reverie, my dear; it's a bad habit."

"Is it, uncle? Well, what you call reverie is a good deal pleasanter than talking to people who don't care about one." As she spoke, her lip quivered, as if there were a conflict of emotions in her mind, among which envy certainly held a place.

The old man took a pinch of snuff, but said no more to Phœbe either about taciturnity or reverie; but he watched the girl more than once, and she puzzled him not a little.

When the time came for guests to depart, Algernon startled his friends by saying:

"I am afraid I must make this my final leave-taking. I have so much to do, I know you will excuse me if I do not see you again. Good-by—good-by. God bless you, my very dear friends."

He shook hands warmly with every one, and returned a second time to Mrs. Freeth, holding her hand between both of his; and he did the same by Kate, her husband standing at her elbow. The pressure of her hand was the last he experienced; but Algernon had fought a good fight, and determined wisely and bravely.

CHAPTER XLVII.

DOWN THE PRECIPICE.

ONLY a few hours have passed, and so far as refreshing sleep was concerned, Phœbe Freeth might as well have remained up all night, for no wholesome rest has been hers; and now that she is dressed, equipped for walking before five o'clock in the morning, she has just the worn, haggard look of a girl who has spent the night in a ball-room.

I wonder if even at this last moment no warning voices sounded in her ear, "Desist, desist!" I wonder if no memory of early lessons of truth and duty made itself felt. I wonder if no home affections tugged at her heart, and agonized her with the knowledge of the pain she was going to inflict? If they did, she made no sign. But the truth is, she was under the absolute dominion of an ardent passion, which she had never once so much as attempted to restrain; it had wellnigh stifled conscience, blinded judgment, and, by slow degrees, worn away maiden dignity and reserve. Still, she did retain just enough understanding of the enormity of her present proceedings to be a little more unnerved than she had expected to find herself. Enormity, that is, in the eyes of the world, she would have said, for the persuasions of Cuthbert Rawlins, the pleading of her own inclinations, and the assurances of the false, bad woman whom she had made her confidante, had in a very great measure justified her conduct to herself.

Phœbe's room had an eastern aspect, and, early as it was, the morning sunshine gleamed on to her toilet-table,

with every moment a broadening band of light. She had hurried her dressing, mistrusting her truth-telling watch, and being ready for her departure a little before the appointed time, she had a few minutes of dull, anxious waiting. As she saw herself reflected in the glass, she was conscious how ill and worn she looked, and the consciousness did not improve her physiognomy. A new terror was beginning to seize her,—the terror that Burton had overslept herself, or purposely forsaken her; when the woman, more in dishabille than Phœbe had ever before seen her, and without the formality of a knock, stealthily opened the door.

"Oh, Burton, it's late, is it not?" said Phœbe, in a suppressed voice. "I'm quite—quite ready."

"Not late, miss, at all, for the clock has not yet struck," replied the woman. "I wouldn't have been behind time on no account. And I have unchained the hall door, and drawn back the bolts, so you will be able to slip out in a moment."

"That's right. I suppose every one is asleep still, and that we are sure not to be heard?"

"Quite sure," cried Burton, in a reassuring tone. "I don't step as light as you, but I am only in my stockings, and that way one is not easily heard;" and as she spoke, the woman put forward one of her shoeless feet.

"Then you can carry my jewel-case; in its leathern cover it looks just like a writing-desk. I can manage my cloak and little bag. I hope the nasty stairs won't creak as they do sometimes."

The stairs seemed better behaved than might have been expected; but a staircase window had been left open for ventilation, and its sash rattled, and its blind flapped noisily in the fresh morning breeze. Phœbe started at the sound, and the next moment the hall clock began chiming the quarters, preparatory to its leisurely striking the hour. In her excited frame of mind, the ringing tone of the clock,

familiar as it was to her ears, seemed quite alarming, and she said, in an impetuous whisper:

"Oh, Burton! won't they hear? won't it awaken them?"

"La, miss, you forget the hundreds of times you've slept through all the hours striking. And you may be sure that long before that clock struck, Mr. Rawlins was waiting outside."

"Oh, I hope so; else what shall I do?"

"Never you fear!"

On a mat in the hall lay a favorite little dog, named Watch on account of his sharpness and vigilance. But why should he bark because members of the family came down betimes that morning? On the contrary, he flapped his bushy tail repeatedly on the floor, by way of greeting, though without rising from his lair.

Burton was right in her belief that Cuthbert Rawlins would not keep them waiting. Long before the appointed hour he had been within sight of the door of Telford House, but had taken care not to attract the notice of a policeman who passed him, by any appearance of loitering or mystery.

Stealthily the street door was opened, and Burton looked out. She raised her hand,—the signal was enough, and in a few seconds the young man had reached the doorsteps. At this stage of the proceedings, Burton was very anxious there should be no lingering. She was even a little impatient of Phœbe's leave-taking, but thrust the jewel-case into Cuthbert's hands, receiving, however, from him a minute packet in return. It contained a roll of sovereigns, in fulfilment of a solemn league and covenant.

It was done. Hannah Burton closed the street door as gently as possible, but now the dog grew a little uneasy, whined audibly, and sniffed at the threshold. How the woman hated the faithful animal; how willingly she would have slain it had she dared! But self-preservation is the

first law of such natures as hers; and so she stooped and petted and caressed it. Yet the dog was but partially soothed, as it shrank away from her pats.

Burton, however, was destined to meet with a greater annoyance than the dog's vigilance before she reached her own room. It may be remembered that Gilbert made one of the party to Portsmouth, and ever since that occasion he had been "half crazed" on the subject of ships and ship-building. The boy engineer—for such Gilbert was—had his head full of certain inventions which he had heard discussed by his elders, and in his youthful arrogance fully believed that he had hit upon some new system of wheels and pulleys, by means of which an enormous rudder could be moved. Gilbert had long been the happy owner of a box of tools, and on the attic floor was a lumber-room, where the boy kept odds and ends of things. He was a famous amateur carpenter, and mended Teddy's broken toys to perfection; but just now he had a higher aim than the mere repairing of injury.

Among his little brother's unused playthings was a ship, in such a doleful plight that a nursery story had been invented to account for its condition. It was supposed to have had its sides stove in by an iceberg, and also to have been wrecked on the Goodwin Sands; likewise, its main-mast had been carried away in a hurricane, and the rudder —that was the great point—the rudder had been broken and disabled. Gilbert felt that here was a great opportunity for an experiment,—he would repair Teddy's ship as a most agreeable surprise against he returned from Hastings, and fit it up with the newly-invented rudder. This work had been the chief occupation of the preceding day, but it was by no means finished; and, being possessed by one ruling idea, the boy had awakened early, and soon determined to have a good spell of work before breakfast. Therefore it was that when Hannah Burton, in her "stocking feet," crept up the last flight of stairs, she was startled

by hearing first the sound of gentle hammering, and then a suppressed whistle.

What was to be done? Burton's plan had been to return to her bed, lie half an hour later than her usual time for rising, and then plead that she had overslept herself. But she could not reach her chamber without passing the lumber-room, the door of which stood wide open! She had not, however, much time for reflection, for Gilbert, moving about the room in search of some implement, perceived her at the top of the stairs, and instantly exclaimed,—

"What, you up at this time in the morning? What next, I wonder!"

"Oh, Master Gilbert, I'm not up,—that is, to be called up for the day at all. But I am almost dead with the tooth-ache, and I have been downstairs to look for a clove to put in my mouth;" and suiting the action to the word, she raised the corner of the shawl she had drawn around her to her face, and swayed her head backward and forward, as if in agony.

"Cloves are of no use," said Gilbert; "have it out. I have got things here just as good as dentists' instruments; you sit down and show me which it is. I'll draw it in a jiffy!"

"You draw a tooth, Master Gilbert! How ever can you think of such a thing!"

"Think of such a thing? Why, I took out two of Teddy's teeth when I was at home for the Easter."

"That was quite a different thing, Master Gilbert," returned Burton; "but I thank you all the same. Perhaps I am a trifle easier since I got the clove; and I'll go and lie down again for an hour. Not that I haven't slept; I woke just now with the 'scrutiating' pain."

"Well, just as you like; but I say, have it out. Now look here, Burton, what a capital job I'm making! Won't the little 'brick' be pleased to find his ship better than new?"

"You're a very clever young gentleman, that for certain; but I'm only interfering and interrupting;" saying which, Burton passed on to her room.

"Clever young gentleman, indeed!" she muttered to herself, when her door was closed. "Other people need be clever too! The little monster, with his teeth-drawing!"

As for Gilbert, the exigencies of his rudder-making drove Burton's supposed toothache for awhile quite out of his memory.

When Phœbe Freeth—perhaps involuntarily—looked back on the closed door of her father's house, no doubt there was a rush of mingled emotions in her heart; but Rawlins was pouring endearing words into her ear, and they stifled any lingering regrets. Her face lost its anxious, haggard look, and flushed now with hope and pleasure.

"Let me carry everything!" he exclaimed, attempting to relieve her of her travelling-bag and cloak.

"No, no; you take care of the dressing-case,—I know how heavy it is. But must we walk?" continued Phœbe; "is no conveyance to be had?"

"I thought it a risk, my darling, to engage anything, and bring it near the house," cried Rawlins; "we are not safe for the next four or five hours."

Phœbe knew perfectly well what he meant, but she made no answer.

"Presently," said Rawlins, "we shall be able to take a cab without attracting notice. Ah, there is one!" he exclaimed, hailing the driver,—but it was a night cab, that had left the stand, and was going home.

Even at this supreme moment of emotion and evil-doing —and perhaps because of the excitement—the young girl was singularly alive to the aspect of London in the early summer morning. There was something almost weird in

the look of the closed houses, as if with a sort of semi-life they slept like their occupants. It was one of those brilliant mornings which weather prophets declare too bright to last, and the sunshine glittered on the top panes of the tall houses till they sparkled like diamonds. But the streets were at first mysteriously still, at least to Phœbe, who had never before seen them, except in the busy hours of the day or night. However, as they proceeded onward, the pavement became more thickly dotted with wayfarers, mostly workmen going forth to the day's toil, or returning from night labor. Mail carts also to and from the post-office rattled along; and traders in perishable articles were early astir to reach the markets; and soon shutters began to be taken down, and the town was awakening.

By this time Cuthbert and Phœbe had procured a cab, and were driving fast to an hotel in the heart of the city, where an early substantial breakfast had been ordered to be ready. The waiter had supposed it was some male friend coming to London by an early train, whom the gentleman expected, and was a little surprised to see a young lady instead. But waiters are so accustomed to strangers, and to circumstances that seem incomprehensible, that their little surprises are very evanescent. The man, however, who waited upon them at breakfast, put "this and that" together, and when about nine o'clock they sallied forth, Cuthbert saying they should be back in an hour, the waiter observed to the barmaid that he shouldn't wonder if they were a runaway couple gone now to be married.

"I noticed," he added, "she had no wedding-ring,—perhaps I shall be able to see her hand when they come back."

Cuthbert Rawlins had made the necessary preparations for his marriage with unscrupulous cunning. He showed Phœbe the marriage license; but she was too ignorant of the affairs of life to know that he must have perjured himself to procure it. She thought that any difficulty about

the non-consent of parents had been overcome by influence —Rawlins was always talking of his influential friends—or else by money payment.

The beautiful old church to which he was now leading the infatuated girl, was situated in the heart of the city of London, not a stone's throw from the hotel where they had breakfasted, and was surrounded by merchants' counting-houses and offices. A century ago, rich men, city magnates, lived where their business was conducted, and married and reared families without, perhaps, often wandering a dozen miles from home. Then gay weddings and pious baptisms, with "troops of friends" looking on, were frequent events in the "Christopher Wren Church;" and on Sundays, its high-backed soft-cushioned pews were occupied by parishioners,—worshippers more or less devout. Now-a-days, the weddings and baptisms are few, and the Sunday congregations pitifully small. Rich merchants live out of town, and the city parishes are like Urban deserts on Sunday. But still the Church Services are performed, however few the worshippers, and there had been no difficulty in arranging for the marriage ceremony to take place.

And now the appointed morning was come, and the curate was in readiness to officiate when the young couple entered the sacred edifice. Hitherto, Phœbe had kept up her spirits with a bravery worthy of a better cause; but as she entered the church, she felt chilled bodily and mentally. She had taught herself to think that she cared not for the support of friends; for her parents' blessing; for a bevy of sympathizing bridemaids; for loving looks and encouraging words; for the symbolizing white dress and sweet flowers,—yet the want of a something which that combination represents made itself felt in a very agonizing manner, and Phœbe burst into tears.

Cuthbert tried to comfort her with fond words and earnest promises of devotion, and so far succeeded, that she was somewhat calmed before they reached the altar. But

appearances were so strange, that the clergyman thought it his duty to ask very pointedly if they had no friends for witnesses, and to make a short exhortation about the solemnity of the occasion, and when—the ceremony having begun—the stirring appeal was made to conscience, as the pair must answer at the "dreadful day of judgment," he paused a little longer than is usual.

But there was no audible response, however conscience might sting. The solemnization of matrimony proceeded; it was the bald-headed old clerk who "gave the bride away;" the pew opener, a widow in rusty black, who held her gloves.

The newly-married pair returned for a few hours to the dingy hotel, where the waiter, in due time, had his curiosity gratified. Before leaving town for their honeymoon, there were certain letters to write, which took both time and consideration. More than one production was destroyed as not desirably worded, and finally the statement of facts and entreaty for forgiveness were made with great brevity. Meanwhile, the day had grown lowering; at the railway station, Phœbe's box was found duly booked and labelled; but they started on their journey in the midst of a thunderstorm.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THOSE SHE LEFT BEHIND.

IT is said that sorrows always come "in battalions," and it was bad news that occasioned some slight delay in the discovery of Phœbe's flight. The first post brought a letter from Hastings, in which the old nurse, Janet Gillespie, gave a very unsatisfactory description of Teddy's condition. Little Lucy, she said, had completely recovered from the effects of the fever, and the sea-breezes had brought back the roses to her cheeks; but with her brother the case was different, and lurking illness still kept him pale and thin. Janet was growing anxious, and wished to be relieved from responsibility by bringing the children home. The Hastings doctor whom she had consulted, had admitted the boy was "very delicate," and the phrase had frightened her, remembering his sturdy little frame hardly two months ago.

Mrs. Freeth knew that the little boy had rallied from the fever less favorably than his sister had done; but the present definite account quite unnerved her,—her hand shook as she poured out the tea, and she could not refrain from tears. Even Mr. Freeth was visibly distressed, for they both knew that the faithful old nurse would not have alarmed them needlessly. Absorbed in thoughts of the younger children, Mrs. Freeth did not for some little time notice the absence of Phœbe. Suddenly, however, she exclaimed,—

"Where's Phœbe? What can make her so late this morning?"

Of course there was no answer to these questions; but some one suggested that the gong should again be sounded, —perhaps she had not heard the first summons; and this, accordingly, was done. But as no Phœbe appeared, the bell was rung, and orders were sent to Burton that she should inquire why Miss Phœbe was not down to breakfast.

The woman was prepared for something of this sort; she had arranged her part, and was equal to the occasion. Presently, she entered the breakfast-room, and said, with the most natural air,—

"I think, ma'am, Miss Phœbe must be gone out; she's not in her room, or anywhere that I can see."

"Gone out!" exclaimed Mrs. Freeth, in anxious amazement; "but when did you see her last?"

"I have not seen her at all this morning; I wondered at her not ringing as usual, and when I went up to see if I was wanted," proceeded Burton, "I found her door ajar, and that she was not in her room. But don't be frightened, ma'am," she cried, seeing the mother's distress, and yet not wincing under it; "don't be frightened; Miss Phœbe's not like a little child. I dare say, this fine morning, she wanted a walk."

"A walk,—by herself,—at this time in the morning! Surely she would not dare—"

"Hush!" said Mr. Freeth authoritatively. He was hardly less moved than his wife, but he had more prudence and self-command, and did not wish Burton to guess at their fears. "Finish your breakfast, my dear," he continued, in a softer tone; "as Burton says, she is not a child, to be run over or kidnapped."

But "finishing breakfast" was out of the question for the poor mother. Indeed, all the family were agitated by the young girl's mysterious disappearance, and Catherine especially trembled with sad forebodings.

Mr. Freeth's words seemed to dismiss Burton, but in a



know all her clothes.

"I did notice, ma'am, with an assumption of so must be wearing her stra black mantle, and her tra oh, ma'am, that great box o.

By this time chairs were and the family group prese dismay. Mrs. Freeth had bu ing, and Catherine and Jane h latter more from sympathy tha unconscious of the one grea Hubert Freeth tried to comf heart was torn by a mighty wrath which was surging in hi spoke with tolerable composure

"Gilbert, my boy," he said, if you can find your sister." brother to witness their grief, cions which oppressed his elde was off like an arrow. Burtc before anything of consequence

"If she is not back in doubt of her

"Oh, papa, papa! what do you mean?" cried little Jenny.

"Ah, you don't know. I forgot that you were in ignorance of our fears. But, Jenny, did she never confide anything to you,—never give you reason to think she was deceiving us?"

"Again I say, dear papa, what do you mean? I would not deceive you for all the world."

"Then you know nothing of this wretched Cuthbert Rawlins?"

"Mr. Rawlins! I have never seen him since the time you and mamma were away; then, when Mrs. Brindley was with us, he came rather often; she seemed to like him, I thought. But what has Mr. Rawlins to do with Phœbe?"

"Oh, perhaps nothing, perhaps nothing!" exclaimed Mrs. Freeth; "but now I see we were all to blame to treat what we knew so lightly."

"Mamma, it was not treated lightly," said Catherine mournfully. "I spoke to Phœbe very seriously, when I told her that she had been seen walking with Mr. Rawlins. I warned her as forcibly as I could of your great displeasure, should she be found encouraging him in any manner. It was she who appeared to treat the affair lightly, as if it were something not worth a scolding. Nevertheless, you may remember that she has never gone out alone since that day."

"And now I see it all," exclaimed Hubert Freeth, in tones of anger and sorrow; "impatient of wholesome restraint, she has chosen to leave her father's house like a thief in the night. But I cast her off; henceforth, she is no daughter of mine."

"Oh, Hubert, Hubert," sobbed his wife, "unsay those words, oh, do unsay them! But think, is there no way of saving her? Can't the police find her, and tear her away from a villain?"

"What clue have we? It seems to me we must wait till she condescends to enlighten us. However, I will make such inquiries as I can, for your sake, Bessie. But don't blame yourself; Catherine is right, the girl was warned; on her own head be the punishment of her wilfulness."

These were the words uttered, in place of a father's benediction, at the moment that Cuthbert and Phœbe, at the altar of the city church, had just been pronounced "man and wife." Oh, if the misguided girl could but have looked in at that sorrowing group, in the familiar room where, only yesterday, she had sat amongst them, I think even her selfish, passion-hardened heart would have been stricken with remorse. But she had already passed a great gulf, and never, never more could she be as she was yesterday.

Wearily the hours passed by, and yet they were sufficiently filled up by little events and much occupation. Mr. Freeth telegraphed to Janet Gillespie to bring home the children immediately, and then he assembled the servants, and questioned them minutely, to ascertain, if possible, anything which might throw light on the wretched girl's flight. But no one had anything to tell, and Burton, apparently sorrowful and sympathetic, diverted all suspicion from herself.

Of course it was discovered that a considerable amount of wearing apparel was missing, as well as the jewel-box, and this added to the perplexity of the case. That such a quantity of articles could have been removed without attracting notice seemed marvellous; and that a child of theirs could have been guilty of the planned cunning the whole proceeding showed, was a bitterness to the parents which, perhaps, only parents could understand.

If any hope of Phœbe's return home had lingered in their hearts, it was dispelled by the letter which reached them in the evening. It was a joint epistle of the newly-

wedded pair, and in it was enclosed a certificate of their marriage. The composition bore a detestable resemblance to the phraseology associated with high-flown romances, in which "all for love and the world well lost" is usually the theme. Even the expressions of regret at the displeasure they feared they had incurred had no ring of sincerity about them,—no traces of tenderness or truth. The letter shocked Hubert Freeth, if possible, more than the act which it was intended to excuse had done, and he poured out his wrath in a torrent of angry words. At the moment he, perhaps, believed what he said, and thought that he had cast a child forever out of his heart.

As for the poor mother, she wept and prayed, and tried to moderate her husband's indignation, and drew round her the other children, as if to gain some solace and compensation from their true love.

It was an hour or two after the letter had been received, and when Hubert Freeth had grown somewhat calmer, that he exclaimed,—

"Lionel shall see them; he is the fit person. They say we may address, 'Post Office, Dover,' and hint at going abroad in a week, unless they are forgiven. I send no forgiveness; but it is right we should know what is the man's true position, and what his plans are. No doubt Lionel can find them out, and it was he who brought the scoundrel into the house."

"We should remember he saved Lionel's life," said Mrs. Freeth; "we should remember that, however bad he is."

"Yes, he saved his life, to be wellnigh his ruin; and now,—why, I declare to you, I would rather have seen Phœbe in her coffin than married to such a gambler and swindler."

"Oh, Hubert, do not talk of seeing her in her coffin!" exclaimed his wife; "we do not know what it is to lose a child."

"She is lost," said the sterner father.

"Not lost, not lost! She is so young! Oh, Hubert, be pitiful!" reiterated Mrs. Freeth, and though he answered not her entreaties, they did not vex him.

It was the saddest day they had ever known; by the force of contrast, the anxious cares of their early days, the petty troubles that had depressed them, the hardships of poverty, seemed as naught compared with the present anguish. Even the luxuries that now abounded—the sumptuous home, the many servants—seemed a cruel mockery, and something out of harmony with sorrow.

In the course of the morning, Mrs. Brindley happened to call, and was admitted, notwithstanding the family trouble. Mrs. Freeth told of Phœbe's flight, and did not quite refrain from blaming Mrs. Brindley for encouraging the visits of Cuthbert Rawlins during the memorable period when she kept house for her friend. Mrs. Brindley retorted that he was not her acquaintance, but, as she supposed, the friend of the family. "It was unjust, that it was, to accuse her of any complicity in this wretched affair;" and though, after a fashion, the dispute was "made up," and they shook hands at parting, it was something very like a quarrel that had taken place between the two intimate friends.

The sultry summer morning, as we know, was followed by rain and thunder, and the strife of the elements seemed in sympathy with the wrath of conflicting passions and sorrows that was oppressing so many hearts. But the storm was over, the evening fine, when Janet and the two little children arrived at home. It was good for Mrs. Freeth to have her mind diverted from Phœbe even by a new care.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE NEWLY-MARRIED PAIR.

YES, Lionel was the fittest person to track his sister, and more likely than any other to discover with accuracy the depth of her degradation in marrying Cuthbert Rawlins. Hubert Freeth was too practical and clear-seeing in the common affairs of life, to find any comfort in delusions; and when, in obedience to his father's behest, Lionel undertook the painful mission entrusted to him, he thoroughly understood that his object was to find out every fact which could throw light on the present position of Rawlins.

"Remember," said the father, "remember it is the exact truth I wish to know. You have the right to probe with questions,—a right derived from me; and I beg of you to impress upon him that there must be no distorting of facts,—no glossing over of circumstances."

"There shall not be, if I can help it," replied Lionel; "but many things I may at once tell you,—things which I know of my own personal knowledge. To begin with, he is deeply in debt."

"And what are his means of extrication?"

"At present, none," said Lionel, "for I know that he lives from hand to mouth in the most precarious manner. He disappointed the relative who placed him at college, and who now has cast him off, and I believe he has well-nigh exhausted the patience of all his connections. But he has a wonderful belief in himself, and, I really think, fully expects some day to obtain a first-rate appointment."

"What is he fit to be?—that is the question," said Mr. Freeth.

"He is fit for many things, if he would but exert himself," replied Lionel eagerly. "Oh, father," he continued, "I wish to tell you literally and exactly all I know and think, and I trust that the bitterness of my own feelings may not make me unjust, even to him. Though Cuthbert Rawlins utterly failed at college, he is not a fool; he is even an educated man,—indeed, a good linguist, so far as modern languages are concerned."

"Picked up orally, I suppose," returned the father, "without real application."

"Perhaps so; but still they are acquired, and ought to do him service."

"I understand," continued Hubert Freeth; "I know the sort of acquirements and the very limited vocabulary which is sufficient to make a show, and be the stock-in-trade of such a linguist. But a diplomatist needs something very different. Pshaw! he seems to me not worth his salt."

"No doubt he would take almost any employment now," continued Lionel. "If he gives any tokens of steadiness, may I—may I hold out the hope that you will use your influence—"

"Certainly not," interrupted Hubert Freeth; "no bargain is fair between those who keep and those who are capable of breaking promises. Why, if he had never done any other bad thing in his life, this luring a girl not eighteen into a clandestine marriage stamps him vile. Besides, he must have taken a false oath about her age. As a father—an offended father—I desire to know the circumstances of my daughter's position; but, recollect, you are by no means the bearer of pardon or maker of promises."

It is charitable to suppose that the young can be but little conscious of the wide-spreading misery which all evil doing occasions. No doubt Phœbe Freeth knew that she

was making—as the phrase goes—an imprudent marriage; but she argued that that was entirely her own affair,—that she was only "her own enemy," and that, if she was prepared "to take the consequences," no one else need complain. She did not realize the anguish she was bring ing on her family, and least of all did she ever imagine what Lionel's poignant regret and sorrow would be.

Arrived at Dover, he discovered the address of the young couple with but little trouble, and, a few days after the elopement, presented himself at their lodgings without warning or preparation. Phœbe held up her cheek for the accustomed brotherly kiss, and tried to look as if nothing of any consequence had occurred; but a hot blush belied the apparent calmness. Lionel gave the kiss partly from the force of habit, and partly because he pitied her youth and inexperience, and knew better than most people how specious were the qualities which had fascinated her. But he declined the hand of the man who had been his dear friend, and was a sister's husband.

"I was prepared for your virtuous indignation," said Rawlins, with a sneer; "but if we are not to be friends, how am I to account for the honor of this visit?"

"I am only my father's representative," answered Lionel, with a sort of sorrowful dignity; "and I come, on his part, to demand some particulars of your marriage. How did you procure a license to marry a minor without her father's consent?"

"I did not know she was a minor," stammered Rawlins. "I never asked her anything about her age; she will tell you so."

"Hush!" said Lionel, "you know your guilt."

"You should not use such a word," cried Phœbe warmly; "I don't know what you mean."

"But your husband does," replied her brother, "and I will leave him to make his confession. I do not like, in your presence, to say what he is."

"When a man is as much in love as I was, he will do anything," cried Rawlins.

"At all events, you have succeeded in your scheme," said Lionel; "and now I must inquire where and what my sister's home is to be."

"And suppose I decline to answer?"

"I should then have very little more to say."

"Under the present circumstances," returned Rawlins, "that might, perhaps, be rather desirable. Yet I shall do nothing of the kind; on the contrary, I shall give you a minute account of our intentions. I came to Dover, knowing it was easy to pass hence to the Continent, if impatient vindictive people forced me to do so; but the astounding intelligence of my darling Phœbe's independence, and her trusting generosity, render such a step unnecessary."

"You say, 'astounding intelligence.' Rawlins, on your honor—such honor as I would hope still remains to you—were you unconscious of her fortune?"

"On my honor, yes!" and the practised hypocrite uttered the lie without outwardly wincing. He had learned many lessons of duplicity at the gaming-table, and one of the first had been to repress the expression of mental emotion.

Lionel was staggered, and yet gladdened beyond measure; but before he spoke again, Phœbe exclaimed,—

"How could he know? I never told him till I was his wife. But I dare say, if I hadn't married Cuthbert, somebody who knew of my money would have pretended to like me, and I should have been made miserable. How cruel you are to be so suspicious!"

"My darling, don't distress yourself," interposed the husband; and he added, with an assumed air of frankness, and as if it were a sudden recollection, "You know you did tell me of some jewels which had been left you, but I had no idea they were so valuable as they turn out to be. As

somebody said, diamonds make a capital umbrella against a rainy day."

"Do you know, Phœbe," said Lionel, "that you had no right to take those jewels away? They ought to have been kept in trust for you till your next birthday."

"I certainly shall not give them up," exclaimed Phœbe, with decision.

"That may be," replied Lionel, "because to compel you to do so would make a fresh scandal; but the executors to your godmother's will much regret the mere good nature and natural confidence in you which prompted them at once to hand you the box."

"I thanked them for their good nature at the time; I should think that was enough," exclaimed Phœbe, "and I have nothing to do with their regrets. But they could do me a good turn if they would. I want some money besides the interest which is to begin next birthday, without waiting till I am of age. Cannot they let me have it?"

"Indeed they cannot," replied Lionel.

"Phœbe, dearest," said Rawlins, "don't tease your brother about money matters. I can arrange everything without his assistance. The fact is," he continued, addressing Lionel, "we are not going abroad. This very morning I have received the offer of a secretaryship to a company that is being formed, and I mean to accept it. Indeed, we are going back to town the day after tomorrow, and as soon as we are settled and see friends, I will take care that you know. At the same time, I do not choose my wife to be scolded and reprimanded, and unless her relations are inclined to make themselves pleasant, they had better keep away. I can understand parents not liking to find themselves outwitted, but, on the other hand, I was grossly insulted, cut dead in the street, and forbidden the house. I would not forego my treasure, and therefore I was obliged to lure it away clandestinely. Why, we had

not met for weeks when she ran away, so closely was the dear girl watched."

"That you lured, I have no doubt," said Lionel; "for my sister's sake, I would not wish to think otherwise. But oh, Phœbe," he continued, "you must have had some evil counsellor, some false friend who helped you to deceive, and was a go-between. Who was it?"

"I shall not tell," was her reply. "It was no one you are in the least likely to suspect; that is all I shall say."

"And what am I to say at home, Phœbe, as a message from you?"

"I have no particular message," she exclaimed, "except that, of course, I am sorry papa and mamma are so angry. I should like to be friends, if they would be kind to Cuthbert, and apologize for all their rudeness; but if they don't wish to see us, what can we do?"

"Phœbe! Phœbe! do you know what you are saying?" cried Lionel, with warmth.

"Yes, quite well. I am married now, and my first duty is to my husband. No doubt you meant kindly by coming all this distance to find us out, and I am very glad to see you; but all the talking in the world cannot alter anything that has happened."

"I know that painfully well; but the present and future have to be considered," said Lionel.

"We shall do very well in our worldly affairs," resumed Phœbe. "The secretary's salary and my money will make a sufficient income; we don't want to be rich till we have tried who are our true friends."

"I was thinking of other things besides income," replied her brother. "Oh, Cuthbert," he added, "let the future in some measure atone for the past. Surely I have a right to make this appeal to you."

"Don't preach," cried Rawlins impatiently.

"Good-by," said Lionel mournfully, and taking up his hat as he spoke; "good-by. But, Phœbe, the day may

come when you will see many things in a truer light, and regret your present hardness and flippancy. If trouble comes, remember I am still your brother."

"Hardness and flippancy! I don't know what you mean," retorted the sister.

"Good-by, good-by," repeated Lionel, and the next minute he was out of the house.

Returning to London without delay, he, the same evening, described to his father all that had passed, relating everything as much as possible in the character of a peace-maker. But Hubert Freeth, in his intercourse with the world, had found many occasions of unmasking falsehood; he was extremely incredulous of "happy accidents," "singular coincidences," and "convenient errors," and placed not the slightest confidence on the "word of honor" of such a man as Cuthbert Rawlins. He utterly disbelieved the assertion that Rawlins had been ignorant of Phœbe's fortune.

"Glad? yes, of course I am glad that the fellow has obtained decent employment," exclaimed the father, in answer to some observation of Lionel's; "and if he keeps it and works respectably at it, there may be a future for him of which we need not be ashamed. Yet what can we hope of a man who could perjure himself to accomplish the marriage? No doubt he will get hold of Phœbe's money; that is to say, raise money on her rights before she is of age, and if it be to pay his debts, I shall not complain. We shall see, we shall see. But his creditors will soon find out that he has married a wife with money, and will give him no peace."

"Yes, tailors and boot-makers," observed Lionel; "but I am afraid Rawlins is deeply involved in 'debts of honor,' —betting and gambling transactions, and besides, he has borrowed money right and left from his friends."

"Did he ever borrow from you?" asked Hubert Freeth promptly.

"Yes," answered Lionel, "the week after he saved my life. Oh, father, I am glad you asked the question."

"And why was I not told?"

"Because I believed his promise that he would pay me in a few weeks,—because I thought it mean to betray his need, and because you had been so generous to me, and I knew what heavy expenses you had just then. Forgive me if I did wrong. I did not wish you to suffer."

"I am not angry with you," said Hubert Freeth mournfully. "I can understand more than you tell me. But that man—that man! and to know that he is Phœbe's husband! I feel that I never really knew trouble till now."

CHAPTER L.

GILBERT'S INQUIRY AND BURTON'S HOLIDAY.

WHILE Mrs. Freeth was bowed by sorrow and shame at Phœbe's marriage, her heart was torn in a far different manner by apprehensions for her youngest son. It was no idle warning of the Hastings doctor when he pronounced him "very delicate;" it was no unfounded dread on the part of the faithful Janet which had made her anxious to bring the child home. He was ill, very ill; the most skilful physicians admitted the fact, and no one could look at the little sufferer and doubt the gravity of his symptoms.

Instead of rallying and recovering health and strength as his sister Lucy had done, the fever seemed to have left seeds of further illness in his system, so that day by day he became weaker. Not that little Teddy was confined to his bed,—he was still able, on genial days, to be taken a carriage airing, and the aim of the whole family was to nurse and amuse him. It was pathetic to notice that as his little hands grew thinner and his limbs weaker, the child's mind beamed out more and more brightly. He prattled his innocent thoughts, and asked pertinent questions on many a subject of which his hearers had believed him ignorant, startling them occasionally by the sagacity of his remarks. Sometimes he recited snatches of hymns and little nursery songs, as if his childish memory were called on to pour out its stores. Happily, he did not suffer much pain, but the gradual wasting away was piteous to behold.

How hard it seemed that two such trials as those which

now oppressed them should come upon the parents at the same time! But it may be that each trouble was the more accurately weighed because of the counterpoise of the other. At least, the mother and father were beginning to seek consolation in the idea that if they must look upon their little one as a lent treasure, it would pass away in the sweet innocence and comparative purity of early childhood. Hubert Freeth had said he would rather have seen Phœbe in her coffin than the wife of Cuthbert Rawlins; and as day after day he clasped little Teddy fondly in his arms, knowing full well that the last hour for holding the frail form was not far distant, he was the better able to say, "Thy will be done," because he had fathomed a deeper sorrow than the death of a beloved child.

It cannot be said that the mother was as yet equally resigned to the death which seemed already casting its shadow upon the house.

She bore up bravely in the presence of the suffering child, but gave way piteously to her grief sometimes in the company of those who could sympathize with it, and oftener in solitude. The trouble which had come upon the household had induced Catherine to postpone indefinitely her return to Five Oaks; and her mere presence seemed a staff for the sorrowing mother to lean on, and her active help like the aid of a legion.

The brothers Raybrooke had sailed for America, but not till Frank had greatly endeared himself to Mrs. Freeth by his son-like devotion in her sorrow, so that Jenny had had the satisfaction she longed for, of hearing her mother say, "I love him." Algernon had called at Mr. Freeth's office, and expressed the warm sympathy that might have been expected from such a friend, but he had not again visited at Telford House.

Gilbert, the schoolboy, at home for the holidays, was, perhaps, learning lessons as useful as any that are conned from books. Of a nature that often overflowed with animal



spirits, and was by no means incapable of "mischief," he had still a warm heart as well as a clear head, and was able to understand his parents' trouble better than, perhaps, they imagined. He loved his little brother very dearly—as it is to be hoped "big brothers" often do love the young ones they have carried in their arms—and, it may be, teased and taught by turns. It saddened him more than he had ever yet been saddened to see the little fellow fading away, and there was no sacrifice on his part too great if even for the briefest time he could please or amuse him. How rejoiced he was that he had mended the toy ship no words can tell, for it had been one of Teddy's favorite playthings, and the child was overjoyed at its renovation, and never wearied of rigging it, and indulging in all sorts of make believes about it, even though its voyages were only across the carpet. It was a touching sight to see Gilbert lending himself to the childish play, and one day, when he was explaining for the sixth time, at least, the mechanism of the rudder, he suddenly thought of the appearance of Burton that bright morning when he was mending the ship, and with a startling suspicion that was new to him.

But Gilbert was a little gentleman, and the idea of prompting a perhaps unfounded accusation against a servant was altogether repugnant to his feelings; nevertheless, he could not rest in a state of indecision, and with a conscience perplexed as to what he ought to do. Saddened as he might be by the family troubles, he was still but a boy, with a reserve of fun at command, and he resolved to venture upon a little "chaff" with Burton, and see what would come of it. An opportunity soon presented itself; meeting the woman one day on the stairs, the bright daylight streaming full on her face, he extended one arm to the balusters to prevent her passing, and, with the other, lifted his handkerchief to his cheek; then imitating her rocking motion that memorable morning, he suddenly exclaimed,—

"How is your tooth?"

"Let me pass, Master Gilbert; now pray do," said the woman. "I am in a hurry."

"Not till you tell me how your tooth is, and whether the clove cured it."

"Oh, it's quite well now."

"But was it the clove?" persisted Gilbert. "I want to know, because I had horrid toothache once, and it would be so jolly to know of a cure."

"Well, sir, I suppose it was; but what does it signify? I had forgotten all about my tooth. Do let me pass."

"In one minute. Now, Burton, had you really forgotten about your tooth, and my kind offer to take it out? It couldn't have been bad toothache, I am sure, or you wouldn't have forgotten. But don't look so frightened; I couldn't pull it out against your will."

"I'm not frightened,—why should I be frightened? Master Gilbert, I'll call out if you don't let me go upstairs directly."

"There, you may go; I'm satisfied."

The shrewd boy had watched the woman's face, and was "satisfied" that it was his duty to make known that Burton was about the house at five o'clock on the morning of Phœbe's elopement. Young as he was, he was conscious that his sister had degraded herself by her marriage, and he felt a brotherly indignation against any one who had aided and abetted in her wrong doing. Nay, he was, perhaps, more absolutely vindictive than his elders, seeing only the plain case of falsehood and deception, and not comprehending the force of a lover's pleadings.

Phœbe's marriage was still so recent, that reference was perpetually being made to some of the circumstances associated with it, and without making his communication of undue importance, Gilbert had soon an opportunity of relating the incident of Burton's supposed toothache, and upstairs and downstairs wanderings at an hour when the household were presumed to be still slumbering.



Hubert Freeth started when he heard the tale, and blamed Gilbert a little for not having told it before. He could not understand how the boy could have forgotten or failed to remark such an incident. Still, the woman had acted her part so well from the hour when she had first proclaimed the young girl's absence to the present moment, that appearances were in her favor, and it seemed a little unjust to attach much importance to what, after all, was but a trifling circumstance. Still, it made an impression, and Burton was questioned about little particulars preceding Phœbe's flight much more than was agreeable to her. To be sure, she had an inexhaustible stock of falsehoods ready for use; but she was becoming uncomfortable, perhaps from sheer fatigue at that terrible exercise of memory which is necessary to the practised liar. Her "place" was what is called a good one, with easy duties and high wages; nevertheless, she was thinking of giving notice to leave whenever some slight rebuke should afford her the excuse of supposing that "she did not give satisfaction."

It was in this mood that she asked for a day's holiday, —a favor cheerfully and instantly accorded; and it was known that by ten o'clock in the morning, Burton was out for the day. No one had presumed to inquire where she was going, and she had not volunteered information on the subject.

It was at luncheon that Reuben Appersley asked his wife, "What she was going to do that afternoon?"

"I have no engagement," she replied. "I can do anything you like."

"Then let us go to the Crystal Palace; I can drive you in the phæton. It is high time we chose the dinner service we want at home, and I hear there is some lovely china to be seen at Sydenham."

Accordingly, the phæton was ordered, and Catherine and her husband departed on the thoroughly "Darby and Joan" expedition of choosing china. It was a lovely day.

The flush of the London season was passing away, but the summer time was in its prime; the air was soft and balmy, and the sky so veiled with light clouds that the sun was not scorching. Altogether, it was the perfection of weather for driving, and Catherine, who, since the illness of her little brother, had been too much her mother's help and companion to stir much from the house, was invigorated by the fresh air and rapid movement. Choosing the china, though a rather lengthy operation, by no means fatigued her—there were many things in the Palace she wished to look at—and Reuben being also well inclined to prolong his stay, they strolled into various courts, till, at last, they found themselves gazing at the mammoth tree, which, a few years later, the cruel flames destroyed.

Catherine looked at it with a sort of personal regard, for on a former occasion she had roughly sketched the tree, considering it one of those miracles of lovely form which are an undying delight to the eye which recognizes their satisfying beauty; and none the less admiringly did she now gaze on the graceful lines she knew so well. Thus was she occupied when startled by a familiar voice exclaiming, with loud and vulgar emphasis, "Come along!"

She instantly perceived the words were not addressed to herself, but they nevertheless caused her to turn round quickly and confront Hannah Burton. It was to her companion, a man, that the woman had spoken, but she recognized Mr. and Mrs. Appersley in a moment, and by instinct adopting a quieter manner, made a courtesy.

"I hope you are enjoying yourself," said Catherine, who had always a kindly and gracious manner with dependents.

"Yes, thank you, ma'am," said the woman; but she hurried away, as if quite unwilling to intrude, or be intruded on.

"That's an ugly fellow with Burton," said Reuben, when the pair were out of hearing; "do you not think so?"



"I did not notice him," replied Catherine; "but, Reuben, I noticed something else, which has been to me quite a shock."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Did you see the ear-rings she wore?"

"No; I was looking at the man. But if her ear-rings are smart, I suppose they are allowable when she is out with her friends."

"I was not thinking of smartness, but of far different things. The ear-rings Burton is wearing belonged to Phœbe; they were part of her godmother's jewels; I recognized them in a moment."

"Do you think she stole them?" cried Reuben.

"No, no; not that. But the fact of her possessing them is a revelation to me," continued Catherine. "Phœbe must have given them to her in requital of some secret service; depend upon it, she has been treacherous."

"But are you quite, quite sure," proceeded Reuben; "it seems to me you had scarcely time to observe what she wore."

"I am quite, quite sure," repeated Catherine; "those ear-rings are too remarkable for me to be mistaken. I have had them in my hand more than once, and I noticed their style and workmanship because I admired them so much. I did not indeed tell Phœbe how much I liked them, lest I should seem to covet them. I only said they were pretty."

"Are they valuable?" inquired Reuben.

"Much more valuable, I believe," replied Catherine, "than I at first fancied. I have recently noticed some ornaments of a similar kind that Lady Hartrington wears, and I know they were given to her by an Indian prince. Oriental magnates scorn to make mean presents. However, their value is of no importance except for the tale they tell. Do you not see they are by no means the sort of present one would make to a servant under ordinary circumstances?"

"Well, I don't understand exactly where the line is drawn in the matter of presents," said Reuben, "but no doubt you are right; and taken in connection with the incident of her being up at five o'clock that morning, the case looks rather black against Madam Burton. I wish I had noticed the jewellery myself; but I had only eyes for the man."

"Was he so very ill-looking?" asked Catherine.

"Not hideously ugly, if you mean that," replied her husband; "some women, perhaps, might think him quite the contrary. It was the gaol-bird look that repelled me."

"Birds of a feather flock together," exclaimed Catherine with warmth, "and if Burton has really lent herself to Phœbe's deceptions, I think she is wicked enough for anything. And what a hypocrite she must be! One's heart sickens at such a revelation of human nature. Oh, Reuben, let us go home; I cannot feel interested in anything more. Besides, papa and mamma must know, and the whole thing be sifted. I will take upon myself to declare that I have identified the ear-rings."

Reuben drove fleet horses, and he and his wife reached town hours before Burton's "holiday" terminated. There was ample time not only to tell what Catherine had observed, but to discuss the subject in the family circle freely and fully, and the result was a unanimous opinion that the woman Burton was an arch deceiver, who must be dismissed from the family without delay. Desiring, however, to act justly, even to the greatest offender, Hubert Freeth determined to make a straightforward accusation, and put the supposed culprit on her defence. Accordingly, he gave orders that Burton should be sent to the library directly she returned home, as he wished particularly to see her.

It was nearly ten o'clock at night when it was announced to him that Burton had returned, and in a few minutes he and Catherine proceeded to the room indicated. It was



desirable there should be a witness at the interview, and, besides, it was she who was, in one sense, the accuser, therefore was it right she should be present.

Tired, probably, by her day's pleasure, Burton had seated herself while she waited, but she rose as Hubert Freeth entered the room, and revealed the full sweep of her smart dress and holiday attire. As she did so, father and daughter both observed the absence of ear-rings, and felt that their removal was itself significant of her guilt. The woman might have wondered a little why she was wanted, but her evil career had hitherto been so smooth, and her late proceedings as she believed so carefully veiled, that if she had any apprehension of "something disagreeable," it was of the vaguest kind. It was true that she had never spoken a dozen words to Mr. Freeth that she remembered, and it was most unusual for him to interfere with female servants; but just now things were at sixes and sevens, with the little boy's illness, and perhaps it was only a mere message from one of the ladies. So it was that Hannah Burton argued and satisfied herself, and when she made her courtesy, it was with what she intended for a pleasant smile on her face. But she was soon disabused, soon aware that the occasion was grave.

In a few frank words, Hubert Freeth stated, that from a discovery he had made, he had reason to believe that Burton had been an accomplice in his unhappy daughter's course of deception and clandestine marriage, and under these circumstances he must discharge her instantly from service in his family. As he would not turn a woman out of his house at that hour of the night, she might remain under his roof till the morning; but at the earliest possible hour she must depart.

As Burton began to realize the crisis which had arrived, the "pleasant smile" vanished, and a livid hue spread over her face; but she was far too practised in deception to be brought to confession, while there was a loop-hole of escape.

"I—I help Miss Phœbe to elope!" she exclaimed. "Oh, sir, how can you think such a thing of me? It's cruel, that it is; it's taking away a poor servant's character to turn her away at a minute's notice, and I vow and declare—"

"Do not forswear yourself," interrupted Mr. Freeth; "it makes me shudder. If you can prove your innocence, I will listen. In the first place, it is known you were up at five o'clock on the morning my daughter left her home."

"I—I up—oh, yes, that is Master Gilbert's telling; but he knows I was up getting something for toothache."

"You told him so, I am aware. But there are other circumstances, I assure you,—principally, your possession of the handsome jewellery you were wearing a few hours ago; my daughter must have given it in requital of what the misguided child called service."

"A paltry silver brooch that she gave me last Christmas, to fasten my shawl," said Burton, with appropriate scorn; "here it is, if you want it," and suiting the action to the word, she removed a brooch from her mantle.

"Keep your brooch; I know nothing of it,—and keep all your ill-gotten gains, for that matter."

"Oh, sir, what do you mean?" exclaimed the woman, who, no doubt, was infinitely comforted by Hubert Freeth's last words.

"I mean the pair of ear-rings you were observed wearing today, and which are far too curious for Mrs. Appersley not to have recognized."

"Then it's you, is it?" cried the woman, turning to Catherine as she spoke; "it's you, ma'am, who would rob a poor servant of her character? I wonder you don't say I stole the ear-rings; what if Miss Phœbe did give them to me,—it was only because she was a kind young lady; and I'm sure I thought they were but cheap imitation things, not worth making a fuss about."

"Then why did you remove them from your ears be-



fore coming home?" asked Catherine, not resenting Burton's impertinent tone.

"Why—why, because they were heavy, and hurt me. Oh, Mrs. Appersley, I see, it is you that are my enemy; but take care, take care, or you will be sorry for all this!" and as she spoke, she glared at Catherine with a look of hate and malice, which she never forgot.

"Silence, woman!" exclaimed Mr. Freeth, now thoroughly roused to anger. "Leave the room, and be ready to leave my house at eight o'clock tomorrow morning."

"And my character, sir, my character!" cried Burton, who was now shedding tears of mingled rage and vexation.

"A just character shall be given," returned Mr. Freeth; "a just character whenever it is demanded; and, meanwhile, if I find I am mistaken in my judgment of you, I will make ample atonement."

"It's cruel and wicked to accuse a poor servant, that it is, when you can't prove anything against her."

"Papa wishes you to go," interposed Catherine; "did you not hear?"

"Yes, I heard, and I'm going. But you please to say to Mrs. Freeth—for she is my mistress, not you—you please to say that I expect the same character as she had with me,—a character that'll get me a good situation. It is my right, and I'll have it; or if I don't,—well, you'll see." And so saying, Burton swept out of the room with the air of a much injured woman.

"If I had doubted her guilt before, I should have believed it now. Her whole manner condemns her," exclaimed Hubert Freeth, the moment the door was closed; "and her insolence! Certainly, I never felt such hot anger toward a woman in my life before."

"She seemed to threaten me in some sort of way," said Catherine; "I wonder what she meant?"

"My dear, she cannot hurt you. No doubt she is wroth

at being found out," continued Hubert Freeth, "and I wish I could have spared you; but I don't quite see how that was possible."

"Certainly, certainly," replied Catherine, "it was only just and right that I should be present; but I wish she were out of the house."

"Well, we need not see her again. Your mother can send her the wages due, and I dare say the creature will be glad enough to be off."

"If I believed in the evil eye, I should think that woman had it," observed Catherine.

"What nonsense!" cried her father, and then they rejoined Mrs. Freeth.



CHAPTER LI.

TEDDY.

IT was only justice to the culprit Hannah Burton, on the part of employers who dismissed her with ignominy, to make assurance doubly sure by a further investigation of many proceedings which preceded Phœbe's flight. The result was a discovery of the part she had played in reference to the box of wearing apparel despatched to the railway station, and an entire justification of all their suspicions. In due time an application was made for the lady's maid character, and Mrs. Freeth admitted that she could make dresses and "get up" lace and dress hair to perfection, but when the question of morals came to be discussed, Mrs. Freeth declared her to be unprincipled and untruthful. Of course, her services were declined, and the same thing occurring a second time, they heard no more of Burton for several weeks, and supposed that she had found some way or other of obtaining a situation without referring in the usual manner to her last mistress.

It will be remembered that it was Mrs. Brindley who, when assisting her friend in the formation of her establishment, had recommended and engaged the lady's maid; and the recollection of this fact, associated with the certainty that it was under Mrs. Brindley's chaperonage that the intimacy between Rawlins and Phœbe had begun, embittered Mrs. Freeth, and in her sorrow and anger she so far forgot herself as to allude to the subject again, and this

time in really reproachful terms. If Mrs. Freeth was found wanting in

"that repose
Which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere,"

under the present sorrowful circumstances the fault might have been forgiven, and assuredly would have been pardoned readily by Mrs. Brindley, but for some complicated wheels within wheels, which made her seek diligently for any occasion of breaking with the Freeths. Yes, the mother who, at one time, had thought Lionel an excellent match for her daughter, and had thrown the young people together whenever she had had the power of doing so, had now very different views for Aline. A rich middle-aged man, with an indifferent reputation, but "a handle to his name," hopeless of winning the young girl's affections by direct appeals to herself, was wooing her through her mother, and Mrs. Brindley was bending all her energies to promote his views. Accordingly, it exactly answered her purpose to greatly resent Mrs. Freeth's warm-tempered taunt, and make of what had been a little tiff, a downright quarrel. And when Lionel, presuming on past intimacy, called with the endeavor to make peace, he was coldly received, and not even allowed to see Aline. He was, however, introduced to an elderly lady visitor, Mrs. Kar, and she heard and remembered the message he left for Aline,—a message which was never delivered.

A trouble, however, was now weighing on the Freeths, which pressed lighter tribulations almost out of mind. Little Teddy was fading fast away; skilled physicians had declared his days were numbered; and though sea air, with every prescribed remedy, had been tried, October found the family returned to town, and gathered round the bed of the little sufferer.

Catherine had returned to Five Oaks for a short time, but she was again at Telford House to comfort and assist her mother.



The sick child lies in the best chamber, with all the skilful appliances of science and luxury about him. Fine linen and silk hangings, sweet flowers and luscious fruits, daintiest diet and rarest wine,—what a mockery they all seemed when marshalled to oppose the march of the King of Terrors! Yet, after long illness, death comes as a kind friend, and never is his touch more gentle than when the unopened flower is culled, and a spirit is released from further probation before the great trials and temptations of life have begun. Yet parents, when they see but a wax-like inanimate image of their lost darling, take but small comfort from wise saws and commonplace condolence; they feel there is some reversal of the natural law at work, and even when they bow in all meekness to the fiat that has gone forth, they know they have fathomed a depth of sorrow which only parents can know.

Hubert Freeth and his wife had never before lost a child, and the strong man felt the blow very nearly as keenly as did the more fragile woman. He shed tears at the first agonizing moment of realizing his loss, but that phase soon passed; yet his grief softened his heart to a degree that astonished himself. Not even to his Bessie would he have owned, as he looked at the dead son, how his heart yearned toward the absent erring daughter. Could he have better borne to see Phœbe thus, as he had declared, than know her the wife of Cuthbert Rawlins?

As for Mrs. Freeth, it is hardly a figure of speech to say that she wept herself blind, the exact truth being that her sight, which had by slow degrees been failing, became much further and permanently weakened by the mental strain of her sorrow and excessive weeping. In all the sorrow Catherine was the great stay and comfort. And, after a little while, a great wave of comfort seemed to pass over poor Mrs. Freeth. She became conscious that a change had taken place in her husband,—a change that drew them softly but surely nearer together. It was as if

the recent affliction had thawed the icy crust of worldliness from about his heart, revealing beneath the deep well of the olden love.

It has been said, and very truly, that the test of a man's regard for a woman is his willingness to give her his time, his society. Money he may bestow from lavishness or a sense of duty; seemly attentions he may bestow from courtly habits of attention; but when a man deliberately cultivates his wife's society, then all is right between them. It may be that there is much nonsense talked about women being educated to be the companions of their husbands. Men do not want argument and clever discussion in their home lives; their combativeness is sufficiently exercised in the world's more public arena. What they do want is goodness to which they can look up, sufficient culture to make the eye bright and thought swift, a "mother-wit" that is sometimes crushed and withered by over-much book learning, but which, allowed fair play, often develops in mature years to true wisdom, and warm affections that out of their great storehouse can generally furnish excuses for man's petulance and caprice,—affections which show the beauty of constancy by bright example, and lead women to yield without murmuring, on the frequent occasions when one or the other must bend.

In his sadness, Hubert Freeth was comforted merely by the presence of his wife, and both felt that their trouble was one with which a "stranger intermeddleth not." And so it came to pass that they were more together, more all in all to each other, than they had been since the days of narrow means and anxious cares.



CHAPTER LII.

THE SNAKE BITES.

IT was about a fortnight after little Teddy's short life had closed, and though Reuben Appersley had come up to London expressly to take his wife home, she still lingered, well aware of the solace her mere presence was to her bereaved mother. However, the day for her return to Five Oaks was now definitely fixed; and, meanwhile, there were some hitherto neglected commissions from the elder Mrs. Appersley to execute, and various personal arrangements to make, which rendered both Catherine and Reuben decidedly busy. This constant occupation was good for Catherine; for the death of her little brother was the first occasion on which that which is the most awful thing on earth had come close to her heart, laying a cold hand there as it plucked away a beloved object, and everything which distracted her mind was, in one sense, beneficial.

Reuben understood, by a sort of common-sense instinct, how desirable it was that she should be fully employed; for though it could not be expected that he, personally, should feel the child's death very much, he was not insensible to the mournful influences around him. It is when the shutters are again folded back, and the daylight streams in on the black garments, and the old routine of the family is again established, "with a difference," that the absent link is often more keenly felt than at the first moment of bereavement. It was so in the Freeth family on the present occasion; while even the poor child's toys were, indeed, "turned to relics," and "gazed at through tears."

Somehow, the little ship had the disagreeable association of Burton about it, especially to Gilbert's mind; and within these few days the woman had been to the house, and made a vain attempt to extort money. Catherine had seen her, had spoken to her, even with some commiseration had promised to find her needlework to do if she chose to undertake it, but still had resolutely refused to give her money, or to take any part in recommending her as a servant. Toward the close of the interview, the woman grew insolent, declined the needlework, declaring she "had not come to that yet," and finally endeavored to intimidate Catherine by threats, similar in character to those she had uttered on a former occasion, but a trifle more violent and explicit. Literally, she had to be turned out of the house, the butler taking her by the shoulders, and leading her away. It was at this juncture that she clenched her hand at Catherine, and exclaimed, "I'll bring you to the ground." Probably, had any one of the gentlemen of the family been at home, there would have been a scene that might have led to consequences at a police court.

It was only a few days after this occurrence, and Catherine had just come in from shopping. She found two or three letters addressed to herself on the hall table, and one to Reuben, and she gathered them all together as she passed on to the inner drawing-room, which was her usual resort. It had been the pleasant habit of their married life to open each other's letters whenever they felt so inclined; and, no doubt, Catherine would have opened this one to her husband had it been unaccompanied by others. But her own letters absorbed her attention, and, as the one in question was directed in a bad handwriting which she did not recognize, it was without interest to her. She thought it a bill or a circular, and put it on the mantel-piece in readiness for him, leaning it against the glass that it might not escape his eye. Yet, after she had seated herself, she more than once looked at the letter with a sort of idle



wonder who it could be that wrote so vile a hand. But Catherine was rather tired, and it was really too much trouble to rise and ascertain the writer.

Presently Reuben, who also had been out, entered the room, and spoke cheerfully on two or three subjects before Catherine drew his attention to the letter on the mantelpiece. Even then, he went on with his discourse, though opening the envelope as he did so; and when the enclosure was released, he sat down at the table to peruse it, just opposite to his wife.

Catherine looked at him as he read, and saw such lines of wrath and horror come into his face, that she herself was dismayed, and could not help exclaiming,—

"What is it? What is it? Oh, tell me."

At her words he looked up, and, doubtless, saw her anxiety reflected on her mobile countenance. As he did so, his own face acquired a sternness such as she had never seen before. All softness had gone from his eyes, as they met her own with a hard, stony stare.

"Oh, Reuben," she cried, now in real terror, "what is it?—what has happened?"

And he answered in a voice like the voice of a stranger, so husky and coarse was it from suppressed emotion,—

"What's all this about Raybrooke?"

"About Raybrooke!" exclaimed Catherine. "What is it you mean?"

"Answer me the truth—"

"I never did other in my life," interrupted Catherine, now rising, and speaking with dignity. "Oh, Reuben, what can make you speak in this manner to me!"

"Answer me the truth,—did you ever faint away in that man's arms?"

"I fainted away when I had returned from the Drawing-room, and I believe Sir Algernon Raybrooke caught me. Did you never know that little episode?"

"Know it!—you never told me. Oh, God! it is all true!" and, dropping the letter from his grasp as he spoke, Reuben Appersley leaned his elbows on the table, and buried his face in his hands.

"All true! Reuben, Reuben, what is it you mean?" and as she uttered the words, she laid her hand on her husband's shoulder. With a slight shudder, he seemed to repel her touch, but he suffered her to take up the letter, and, raising his face, looked at her fixedly as she, sinking into a chair, read the following lines:

Honored Sir,—You may think it is revenge for the cruel treatment I have received which makes me tell, but for all that it is the truth, and I think it right you should know about the love-making of your wife and Sir Algernon Raybrooke, both afore she was married and since. If you doubt my words you ask Mrs. Gillespie, for she's thick in it. Ask her about the waltzing with him not three days before she was married to you. Ask her about the nose-gay of flowers as was sent the morning of the wedding. I've got them flowers still, dried up as they are to sticks. And as for the kissing and fainting away when she was in her grand court dress, that I saw with my own eyes, and would swear to any day. And so I am Honored Sir,

Yours truly,

Hannah Burton.

P.S.—I might have written you a nonymous letter; but I am willing to stick to what I say. I am not so low yet as to take in needlework. I've got a good place at last, and if it's not quite the sort I wished, it's the fault of them as refused me a character. But my new mistress is as good as Mrs. Reuben Appersley any day, and not such a hypocrite.

There is a condition of agonized excitement in which there seems no alternative between instant death or madness and the maintenance of absolute calmness; and as Catherine read this letter, she felt herself crushed down to a far deeper depth of anguish than that which finds



relief in tears and outcries. She was conscious of her husband's unflinching gaze; conscious, too, that this, to him, also, was a moment of supreme suffering; but there was not a flash of hesitation in her mind, not an instant of unworthy cowardice to whisper prevarication. She had become deadly pale, but she looked up, and met Reuben's gaze with tearless eyes, as she said, in a clear, low tone:

"Yes, I waltzed for about a minute with Algernon Raybrooke the night of the children's party; I believe that he was the unknown friend who sent me the bouquet, but I do not know it. Yet, admitting all this, I have to add that he never spoke a word of love to me in his life."

"Ah, but you feel that he loves you!" exclaimed Reuben, with something more like a groan than a sigh. "Answer me—I will have an answer."

"I have no right to say so," murmured Catherine; and she added, "Oh, Reuben, Reuben, now you are becoming cruel."

"Cruel!—I cruel? that is a good joke!" exclaimed Reuben; and he continued, "Now tell me about the fainting and kissing."

"If Sir Algernon took an unworthy advantage of my insensibility, I never knew it; but I will not believe the accusation of such a woman as Burton; nothing would make me believe it, short of his own confession."

"But why was I never told of the fainting-fit?" again urged Reuben, in the same hard, unpitying tone.

"From inadvertence, in the first instance," replied Catherine. "It had happened hours before you returned home, and if you recollect the evening at all, you will remember how many subjects there were to discuss,—the children's illness and the discovery of Phœbe's deception seemed to drive smaller affairs out of my mind. Why, I doubt if my mother knows of the occurrence to this day. I know I begged Hester not to add to her distress by telling of it."



"You seem to think fainting to the point of insensibility a small affair," returned Reuben. "I cannot say I should have considered it so. I wonder what other events have been kept from me,—inadvertently, of course," he added with bitter irony; and then, as if his wrath had gained fresh fuel, he exclaimed, "What does the woman mean by Mrs. Gillespie being in the thick of it?"

"You had better ask her," retorted Catherine, whose anguish now seemed merged in indignation, the indignation, in its turn, being mastered by a sense of helpless suffering; all the wretched tangle of her lot passing in rapid review through her mind, intensified by the cruel thought that Janet, whom she so loved—Janet, who alone had suspected the sharpest pain of her life—must have betrayed it; for she knew nothing of the listening at the warped door. The conflict of emotions was too fierce for outward calm to be any longer maintained. Catherine burst into a passion of weeping, and buried her face in her handkerchief.

"My belief is that you loved that man!" cried Reuben. "Answer me, and don't store up a lie for the Day of Judgment"

"Oh, Reuben, Reuben, you are killing me!" moaned Catherine, and without uncovering her face. "On my soul, I have been to you a true and loving wife in word and deed."

"And thought?"

"I have fought such a fight with thoughts that, but for that letter, I must have conquered. Oh, Reuben, Reuben, why would you marry me! I never wronged you but in suffering myself to be persuaded."

"Ah, I remember." And he sighed deeply, as if a new fountain of sorrow were unsealed, which, if it served to melt his wrath, intensified his grief and regret. Calm looks and cold letters; the lengthened engagement, and Catherine's desire to cancel it; her profession of cousinly regard, and the vague dissatisfaction of his married life,—



all fell into place like so many links of a chain, or the pieces of a child's puzzle; while the voluntary exile of Algernon Raybrooke seemed to ratify the truth of everything Catherine had said, and break up the blackest clouds with which his mental atmosphere was charged.

In this terrible crisis, Catherine's thoughts swept back over all the period of her engaged and married life, from the day when "Cousin Reuben" won a half reluctant "yes" to his pleadings; and, notably, she remembered the day when he had owned to the demon of jealousy that slumbered in his heart. Ah, now she had seen the hideous monster roused, and felt its fury! And yet, though remembering so much, the dreadful present seemed all in all; her future—her earthly future—was obscured, as if the mist of tears and the darkness of heart-anguish hid all things to come.

Suddenly, she rose to leave the room, and was obliged to pass close to her husband. As she did so, Reuben caught the hand that hung by her side, and grasped it, but without speaking. Her right hand held her handkerchief pressed tightly to her mouth. She was touched by his action, and her tears flowed more freely than ever; but she spoke only a few words, and they came forth indistinctly.

"Dear Reuben—see—I must go."

Reuben looked up. Catherine's handkerchief was crimsoned. She had broken a blood-vessel!

CHAPTER LIII.

JANET AND HER BEST BELOVED.

WE may depend upon it there is always some element of truth in time-honored phrases, and it may be that a "broken heart" is not quite the myth some people suppose it. Yet how few there are who can sincerely sympathize with any distress that does not take a palpable shape, unless, indeed, it be very similar to some sorrow from which they themselves are suffering at the moment. "They are the silent griefs which cut the heart-strings," and no doubt the life-disappointment with which Catherine had wrestled had undermined her health, or her physical frame would have held out a little longer, would have borne another screw or two of the mental rack on which she was being tortured. But when Reuben Appersley recognized what had happened, and witnessed a sharp and dangerous physical suffering, a revulsion came over him; he was pitiful in an instant, and supported Catherine in his strong arms to her chamber.

In this first moment of painful excitement the dreadful letter from Burton was left for, perhaps, ten minutes on the drawing-room table; but when Reuben had given his wife into Janet's charge, and sent off for medical advice, he remembered the letter, and hastened to recover it. There was no appearance of any one having entered the room during his absence, so that when he crushed the horrid slander into his pocket, he had no fear that it had been seen.

And now there was another great grief for the Freeths.

Another dear child was stricken by alarming illness. Again physicians' carriages were at the door; again the family stepped lightly and spoke softly; and again one chamber in the house became a sacred spot to which all thoughts were turned.

Happily, the faculty dissipated ideas of immediate danger, but they spoke with a certain gravity of the necessity of future care, and the inevitable tediousness of the patient's recovery. One of the first and most peremptory commands was that she should not attempt to speak for many days, perhaps weeks to come; and even the exertion of writing on a slate, with which at present she was provided, was considered so great that she was advised to abstain from using it as much as possible.

Reuben Appersley had plenty of determination when once he had made up his mind what to do, but he was not sure that the present trouble was one he could best steer through without any sort of help or advice. And yet there was obviously but one person in the world to whom he could bare his sorrow, and that was his wife's father, Hubert Freeth. The more he thought on the subject, the more persuaded he became that, for Catherine's sake, not less than his own, it was right that he should be apprized of what had happened, but still it seemed a terrible thing to lay that letter before him. Reuben, however, was relieved from any indecision in a very unexpected manner.

When Hubert Freeth came home from his office that mournful day at a somewhat earlier hour than usual, he sorrowed at the news of Catherine's illness, but scarcely seemed surprised; and hardly had he and Reuben met before it became apparent that there was very little to communicate either on one side or the other. The fact was, the cruel slanderer had written a letter to Mr. Freeth, directing it to his office, almost identical in its contents with that which Reuben had received. Perhaps she had doubted whether the latter would be allowed to reach

Reuben's hands, and had adopted a second means of satisfying her malignity.

No doubt Hannah Burton, judging of human nature by the lurid lights of her own "hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness," thought that the father and husband would believe her vile accusation, at least to the extent of causing a great estrangement of Catherine from her family, with censure and disgrace. Also, it may be surmised, that the slanderer expected some overtures would be made to bribe her to silence.

But in her evil anticipations she had, in one sense, vastly overrated her own powers of mischief. Hotly indignant as Hubert Freeth felt on reading the vile letter, he saw at a glance that it was the effusion of malice, and did not believe that it contained even those little grains of truth which Reuben had discovered. He would have liked to punish the writer, as he well knew the law might have punished her; but alas! the delicate bloom of a woman's reputation ever suffers by the handling that is necessary for its vindication. After an hour's distressing and indignant discussion, father and husband both agreed that the most dignified course was to take no sort of notice of the letters. In his great wrath, Reuben was not quite easily persuaded to silence, but, after a time, he felt the force of Hubert Freeth's arguments, and even admitted that the finding herself entirely ignored might really be the severest punishment to the woman.

If she had any emissaries, as it was very likely she had, who brought her news of what was going on at Telford House, she must have experienced a blank disappointment; unless, indeed, she was able to associate Catherine's illness with her own dark work. Out of pity and tenderness to Mrs. Freeth, already bowed down by sorrow, she was not apprised of the letters. And all that a looker-on could have reported was the absolute devotion of an entire household to a beloved and stricken sufferer.

Nevertheless, one person had been enlightened. Janet Gillespie's name had been connected with the slander, and Hubert Freeth, well knowing the rectitude and fidelity of the old nurse, believed it would be a relief to Reuben's mind to hear any explanation she might have to give. What had she to tell? Nothing but what had been open to every observer,—that Catherine had danced with Algernon Raybrooke the night of the children's party, and had received, on her wedding morning, a magnificent bouquet from an anonymous donor. Positively Burton could only have surmised whence it came, since no one knew. As for the fainting fit, Janet had not heard of it till days afterward, she having been engaged with the sick children at the time. But she spoke so warmly and with such intimate knowledge of the beloved Catherine, that she elicited pity for herself as being the secondary object of Burton's accusation; and she surely had no right to betray her own guesses and conjectures as to Catherine's mental struggles. Yet the time came—not just yet—when she was charged to tell Reuben any truth which might loosen Catherine's hold upon his heart.

But this revelation, made to Janet the second day of Catherine's illness, explained not only the seizure but the mental suffering which the faithful woman had detected during the long night-watch she had kept. It was well they had confided in her. Though Catherine might not speak, she could listen, and Janet, by a few words of explanation, cleared herself completely; and having the quiet wisdom of a Christian woman, and Catherine being her best beloved on earth, the wakeful hours of many a future night were periods of soul-nurture to the sufferer, that brought peace and resignation which were never more to depart from her mind.

It was late in the autumn before Catherine was in a condition to be removed to Five Oaks. Even then she was such an invalid that Janet accompanied her as nurse.

CHAPTER LIV.

CATHERINE AT FIVE OAKS

MRS. APPERSLEY, senior, was expecting Catherine's return home with some anxiety. Not that she allowed herself to think very seriously of the illness, the particulars of which had been duly communicated to her; and be it remarked, that Reuben's mother had a surprising power of "not allowing herself" to think thoughts which her strong will made her desirous to ignore. Nevertheless, she understood that it was as a decided invalid the true mistress of the house must be received. And so, in making her preparations, the wide, old-fashioned sofa, which usually remained at the end of the room, as if nailed to the wall, was drawn to one side of the fire-place, and a large folding screen, long disused, was brought from an up-stairs lumber closet in readiness to ward off draughts, and old Mrs. Appersley sincerely hoped that Catherine would not "give way" to keeping her room, but would endeavor to take her place in the little circle as of old.

Certainly, these little alterations in the arrangement of the "*salle* of the gold cup and battling deer" were improvements, making the comfortable room still more cosey; and Mrs. Appersley running over in her mind the various delicacies with which she had stocked the larder, felt thorough satisfaction at her own forethought.

It was in this frame of mind that she listened for wheels in the avenue, and saw the carriage which had been sent to the railway station, draw up. First Reuben dismounted, next Janet Gillespie, and then both assisted Catherine, and

supported her, one on each side. Mrs. Appersley had come into the hall to receive them, and seeing the pale, attenuated woman who advanced slowly to meet her, she gave a little cry of surprise.

Catherine smiled. She fully understood that her appearance had shocked her mother-in-law, but she herself was thoroughly aware of the great change that had come over her; and she knew how much more apparent it must be to one who had not seen her since before her illness, than to those who had watched her for the last few weeks.

"Do not be anxious about me," she said, when she had received Mrs. Appersley's kiss. "I know I look ill, but you see I am come home for your kind nursing."

"The very best thing you could do," exclaimed Mrs. Appersley, with more tenderness than she often evinced; "though you were not born in Meadshire, I consider it a sort of native air to you. Janet can tell you how it brought you from death's door when you were a baby, and we'll see, my dear, what we can do for you now."

"Dear aunt, I am glad to be at home again, I assure you," replied Catherine, who, by this time, had reached the sofa.

"It is that horrid London that has knocked you up," exclaimed Mrs. Appersley, warming herself to something very like anger as she spoke; "how people can live in its noise and smoke and dirt I cannot imagine."

"Ah, the quiet and freshness here are delightful," said Catherine.

"Mother, it is sorrow and excitement that has done the mischief," observed Reuben; "you forget what a year of trouble it has been."

"No, I don't," she replied, "and who knows,—if they had sent poor little Teddy to me, new milk and the breath of the cows might have cured him."

"I hardly think it," cried Reuben; "believe me, every human means was adopted to promote his recovery; it is

the consciousness of this which reconciles us all more than anything else. But there were other troubles besides poor little Edward's death."

"You mean Phœbe!" exclaimed Mrs. Appersley; "but in my opinion, a girl who could act as she has done, is not worth thinking about. I hope Catherine has not been so weak as to fret about her."

"It is not quite easy to throw off a sister," said Catherine, a little conscious that she was concealing the great personal trouble of her life; but very grateful to Reuben for his helpful tact in assisting her to do so.

At this moment there was a diversion which turned the conversation. Floss was heard scratching at the door, as, with a sharp bark, she entreated to be let in. Floss was growing old now, and no longer bounded with agility, but she trotted to Catherine's side, and evinced her delight in all orthodox dog fashion. After one or two ineffectual attempts, she even accomplished a leap on to the sofa, and nestled at Catherine's feet, just within reach of her hand.

"Down—down, bad dog!" exclaimed Mrs. Appersley, senior.

"Oh, let her stay," pleaded the invalid, whose thin fingers were now half hidden by one of the dog's drooping ears; "pray let her stay; she is so faithful, and I love her so much."

"Oh, of course, if you wish it. But I like dogs in their places, not upon sofa cushions," returned the elder lady.

"Floss will be quite a companion to me," continued Catherine. "I can see that she has grown staid since last year, and will be able to share my quiet life."

"You always were ridiculous about that dog," observed Mrs. Appersley; "but I am sure, my dear, I am glad of anything that pleases you."

Be it remarked that this was a very affectionate little speech, considering who was the speaker; and Catherine

felt it as such, making many grateful resolutions on the strength of it. For there is a condition of bodily weakness, in which the poor human nature craves so ardently for kindly help, and gentle forbearance and loving sympathy, that it is grateful for mere shreds and patches of consideration. And Catherine was now infinitely touched by yielding softness from one accustomed to rule. In future she would consider her words more than ever, so as, if possible, never to thwart her husband's mother.

"Floss shall have a shawl of her own to lie on," said Catherine, "then it will be all right. It is quite true that down pillows were not intended for dogs."

And now there began for Catherine a life of quiet routine, in which one day was exceedingly like another. Winter was approaching; yet on exceptionally mild days she was drawn for a little while in a garden chair along the sunny paths. Otherwise, she reclined chiefly on the old sofa, with books and work within reach. Often, especially when Mrs. Appersley was occupied elsewhere, Janet sat with her; but there were many hours when, too listless to read or work, she gazed out at the landscape, with a sort of pity for the leafless trees and the load of wintry ills they seemed to bear. Perhaps oftener still her eyes made a "tour" of the room, associated as it was with memorable events of her life,—the childish days, when, as a little visitor, much petted and caressed, she played with her doll, came back to her vividly, and the girlish time when "Cousin Reuben" first played the ardent lover. Then, mentally, was reacted all the period of her short married life,—the honeymoon days, the election time, with all its episodes, and the ordinary country life, which she had thought commonplace and dull, but which, with its out-of-door enjoyments, seemed now, in its retrospect, brightly pleasant and exhilarating.

But all these memories were like the pages of a sealed-up book; and "never again" seemed written everywhere.

As Catherine, reclining on her sofa, gazed straight forward, her eyes always rested on an old-fashioned mirror, which reflected the battling antlers above the chimney-piece, but diminished and made grotesque by the distorting glass, the bony branches seemed to have lost their significance. They no longer hurt her eye as the type of hopeless struggle and wretched entanglement; or was it that Catherine had passed to a higher form in the school of life, and that earthly hopes, and struggles to fulfil them, had ceased to be among her lessons?

Sometimes Reuben read to her; he seemed to like that occupation better than talking to her, though he always brought her scraps of interesting news, and often dwelt on the inquiries he was still prosecuting with regard to George Otway. In many thoughtful ways he made it a point of duty and kindness not to neglect her. Keenly well Catherine knew that, though he was no longer the lover-husband, he was still the true and tender friend, and both, perhaps, believed that no looker-on could discover that a gulf had opened between them. A gulf, it might be, soft with moss, but still a chasm that would never close.

But Reuben's mother was too shrewd and observant to be entirely deceived; yet, like most suspicious persons, she jumped at wrong conclusions. She thought Catherine's sad state of health had, in some measure, alienated her husband, and though she was herself bitterly vexed and disappointed by it, she was far too "proper" a person to excuse even her own son, should he cool in his lawful allegiance.

"Reuben," she exclaimed, one morning after their breakfast—a *tête-à-tête* meal, for Catherine never came down till nearly noon—"Reuben, should we not have further advice for Catherine? her recovery seems so slow!"

"I do not think she would like a strange doctor," replied Reuben. "Mr. Goodfield watches the case, and calls nearly every day, and he is in communication with the London physicians,—what more can we do?"

"But she don't seem to mend. And your wife, your dear wife, is too important a person to be trifled with."

"Mother, do not talk of trifling. She has had, and shall have, every earthly alleviation of her sufferings."

"Of course, of course;" and then, somewhat hurt by her son's manner, she passed into a little wail of regret. "Ah, who could have thought that such a trouble as this would come into your married life!"

"Ah, who indeed!" sighed Reuben.

"I know it is a great trial," said Mrs. Appersley; "but I hope we shall both be able to love her just as much as if she were well and strong."

"Mother, what are you driving at?" exclaimed Reuben, starting up, and speaking in hot anger; "what is it you mean?"

"Mean? Exactly what I say. I wonder, Reuben, you dare speak to your mother in such a manner."

"There are some things a man will not bear, even from his mother," cried Reuben; "and if you are any way disappointed in my married life, be pleased to remember you were the match-maker."

"Oh, oh—"

"Listen, if you please. Whatever my faults may have been, want of love and devotion to my wife has not been one of them. She knows that as well as you ought to do, —poor girl, poor girl!"

"Then what is it?" cried Mrs. Appersley.

"*It, it*,—what phantom are you talking about?"

And cowed and mystified more than she had ever been in her life, Mrs. Appersley had no rejoinder ready.

"Forgive me, mother," said the son, after a little pause, "forgive me, if I have used strong language; I did not mean to be undutiful, but you do not know how sharply your words stung me."

CHAPTER LV.

GEORGE OTWAY AT LAST.

WINTER had set in with sudden sharpness. For twenty hours snow had fallen, with scarcely a minute's interruption; at first in the great feather flakes which quickly whitened the ground, and then in the finer, more dust-like crystals, which filled up every crevice, and made the earth's winding-sheet complete. Afterward came a hard frost, which crisped the surface with its fine glaze, which stopped the water-mills, and bid the little streams to tarry.

Of course, it was weather that made such an invalid as Catherine had now become, more a recluse than ever; but she was so carefully shielded from its inclemency, that it cannot be said she suffered from it. Only the in-door life was now absolute, and its monotony but little varied. Not that she wearied or sighed for more excitement; she was quite conscious that her fragile frame was unequal to exertion, and rejoiced at every simple gratification that was within her reach. It is a truth, little, I think, dwelt upon, but a truth nevertheless, that in certain stages of illness, of great physical debility, unaccompanied by acute pain, the mind seems preternaturally clear and active. Perhaps not usefully so to the world at large, because the mind's servant is inefficient, but with a power of self-enrichment beyond computing. It was so in Catherine's case. All that in her short life she had seen and heard, and read and thought, that was best worthy of remembrance, seemed, in its quintessence, to be ready at her call.

Thought interweaved with thought, producing unexpected combinations, but always of a sort that made order out of chaos, and threw light on dark places. She was learning those best lessons which fifty years of great earthly happiness might have failed to teach her.

It was one Saturday evening. The little group, consisting of Reuben Appersley and his wife and mother, had just finished tea, and the table had been cleared. Curtains were drawn and the lamps lighted, and the fire had lately been replenished by a great log, which threw a white and flickering light about the room we know so well. It seemed to make the quaint figures on the screen quainter, and Floss's glossy coat, as she lay on the hearth-rug, more glossy; it flickered on the mirror till the antlers depicted therein seemed to quiver and unlock; and it burnished the gold race-cup, and made the portrait above it look like life.

The firelight brightened even the living forms, each one of which had something of the picturesque in its appearance. Reuben, in the prime of his manhood, touched with care, which had deepened the lines of thought, and so added a touch of dignity to his comeliness. His mother, tall and thin, seated erect on a somewhat stiff-backed chair, with gray hair neatly braided beneath a coif suitable to her age. Her dress black silk, accidentally relieved by a mass of scarlet wool she was occupied in knitting for a hood. Her bony hands were full of character, as, adorned only by her wedding-ring and a massive mourning ring, they moved the knitting-pins with easy activity.

Catherine, who was a little better than usual, had left her sofa, and was sitting near the table; her fingers were also busy, but on some delicate white embroidery. Her black dress was made warm with much swansdown, which scarcely looked whiter than herself. She was hoping Mrs. Appersley would not notice her work, or make inquiries about it, for the embroidery was intended as a *souvenir* for Hester

Otway, who had been full of kindness during Catherine's illness in London. One other touch may make the picture of the invalid more vivid. Catherine's rich dark hair was simply plaited and twisted, but, young as she was, she wore some white lace on her head. She had excellent taste, and felt the æsthetics of dress without reasoning about them. Why is it—can any one tell?—that an invalid woman of any age looks haggard, weird, "uncanny," without something that, at the least, typifies and suggests the "cap?" Is it that there is a bold assumption indicated by the bare head in woman just opposite to the expression of the bare head of man, and which finds warrant in St. Paul's direction to the sex? At any rate, the most artistic nations have adopted the veil or the mantilla, the coif, the turban, the hood, or the *pezzotto*, to be worn quite early in life.

Reuben was turning over a newspaper rather listlessly, sometimes reading a little paragraph aloud, or chatting about some local affair. To a looker-on the scene was calm and peaceful, without the slightest sign of any approaching storm. Suddenly wheels were heard in the swept avenue, and, at the same moment, Floss roused herself, and started up with ears raised to listen. Then a lusty pull at the bell wakened its deepest note, as, in the frosty air, every sound had a little touch of shrillness that seemed to invite the echoes.

"Visitors at this time!" exclaimed Mrs. Appersley; "I wonder who it can be? Saturday evening, too, when there is no drawing-room fire."

"Never mind, mother, about the drawing-room," said Reuben, so little stirred that he was still holding the newspaper when a servant entered the room, and delivered what appeared a letter, saying,—

"The gentleman, sir, is waiting."

But the missive was no letter, only a sealed envelope enclosing a card, on which was written, "George Otway."

Reuben started to his feet with a strong exclamation

not usual with him, and which need not be repeated. Then, remembering the presence of the servant, he controlled himself, saying to the man,—

"Tell the gentleman I will be with him directly; and see to his trap, whatever it is," he added, "and have it put up."

"Will you see him?" inquired Reuben, turning to his mother, who had possessed herself of the card, and whose face seemed kindling with exultation. Flushed cheeks, flashing eyes, dilated nostrils, transfigured the faded and usually rigid countenance, reminding one of alabaster lighted from within.

"See him!" exclaimed Mrs. Appersley; "of course I will. Bring him in here at once; let me hear every word he has to say."

"And you, Catherine,—are you equal to the excitement of such an interview?" asked her husband.

"Perhaps not; perhaps it would be better I should go to my room," exclaimed Catherine, drawing a shawl round her. "If I ring, Janet will come to me."

Reuben helped to adjust her shawl, and opened the door, which was just at the foot of the old oak staircase. Then he passed across the wide hall, where a good fire was blazing, before which stood a stranger stretching out his hands to warm them. At the sound of footsteps the visitor turned; and thus it was that Reuben Appersley confronted his father's dearest friend, George Otway. By an instinct of hospitable greeting, Reuben held out his hand, but the other did not take it.

"Wait!" he exclaimed; "not yet."

"As you please; I am sorry if you feel enmity. But be good enough to follow me; my mother wishes to see you," said Reuben.

"Does she really? In the old days there was not much love between us," cried Otway, in a tone that would have been very bitter but for a sigh which was audible; and, as

he spoke, he moved across the hall as one who knew well the ways of the house.

The visitor's thick overcoat was visibly touched by the frost, and as, hat in hand, he made a formal bow to Mrs. Appersley as he was ushered into her presence, he seemed to bring with him some of the inclemency of the night. Advancing toward the table near which Mrs. Appersley had been seated, he leaned one hand upon it, but declined the chair Reuben placed for him.

A stalwart man was George Otway, though now between fifty and sixty years of age. Broad-chested and strong-limbed, he was the very type of a man capable of "roughing it" through life, and assuredly he looked as if he had known hardships and trials. His bronzed and weather-beaten face appeared the darker from its contrast with a thick white beard, while a pair of hazel eyes, still bright and clear-seeing, gave animation to the countenance.

Though the visitor remained standing, Mrs. Appersley had resumed her chair, her words of greeting having been,—

"I should have known you anywhere."

"And I, madam, may return the compliment," cried Otway, "if compliment it be. But, good heavens!" he continued, speaking with increasing excitement, "nothing here seems changed, if only I could fancy that the son was the father,—the son that, no doubt, fancies he has brought me to bay."

"I have no wish to use such a word," said Reuben, a little bewildered by George Otway's manner.

"Very possibly," replied the visitor, "for people never like ugly names to be given to their deeds. But I wish you to know that I am by no means at bay; I come here of my own free will, though to say a few words which never would have been spoken if you had not set men-hunters on my track. I came to England about my own

affairs—to pay my debts and provide for my daughter—and I should have returned to Australia without making any further sign, if I had remained unsuspected and unmolested."

"Was it not natural that I should seek out the only person who could, once for all, thoroughly clear and vindicate my father's memory?" said Reuben, with gentleness.

"And did it never occur to you," cried Otway, now sinking into a chair, "did it never occur to you that the friend, who was to your father as a brother, might have his own way of shielding that father's memory?"

"I said vindicate, not shield," replied Reuben.

"I am aware you did. Oh, what folly there is in the world! I wish, young man, you did not look so like your father,—I wish that picture was not staring me in the face; and oh, I wish now that I had contented myself with baffling all your clues,—as, mark me, I have done, for your people have never quite found me."

"Mr. Otway," said Reuben, "if my inquiries have given you pain, I am sorry for it, and I beg pardon of my father's old friend. I never meant to injure you. You talk now as if you were in easy circumstances; we did not know this. Forgive my frankness. In seeking you, I meant to compensate you fully for any inconvenience I might occasion."

"From my heart I wish you had left me alone. Now, say exactly, what is it you want?"

"What you only can do," returned Reuben. "Of late years the old slander has been revived, and I want you to make a deposition, and sign and print it, renewing and amplifying the evidence you gave on the inquest after my father's death, and thus give me the power of punishing falsehood and silencing calumny."

"What if I refuse to do this?" said Otway.

"But surely," cried Reuben, "surely you will not refuse to perform such a simple act of kindness."

"Say justice," interposed his mother, with some asperity."

"Justice! Is it really justice, madam, that you are seeking?" asked Otway.

"Do not let us bandy words," cried Reuben. "Now that you have returned to England, under happier circumstances than you left it, why should you object to the performance of a good deed in memory of an old friend?"

"Ask me not for reasons, and betray me not in any way. Let me be to you as to every one else,—George Oldfield, the Australian adventurer. I cannot do what you desire."

"And you will not even write down the facts that you know?" said Mrs. Appersley.

"I will not!" replied Otway.

"Then, if there is law in England, you shall be made to comply!" exclaimed Mrs. Appersley.

"Hush, mother," cried Reuben, deeply moved.

"I will not hush," cried his mother, the hot temper gaining the mastery. "I always knew Mr. Otway was your father's worst enemy, and he is proving himself so to the last."

"Beware!" exclaimed Otway; and in the one word there was a concentration of threats.

"Beware of what?" cried Mrs. Appersley. "You are not now among savages, but in a civilized country, where people can be made to do what is right. All the world shall know you are in England, and you shall be appealed to by some one who can make you speak out."

It will be perceived that Mrs. Appersley had rather hazy notions about the law, and her own power of enforcing it, but Reuben was too intent on calming her wrath to argue with her; and their visitor looked at her scornfully and angrily for a few moments, before his pent-up feelings had vent.

"And so I am to be cursed as your husband's worst

enemy!" he exclaimed. "Well, in requital, you shall know the truth,—the whole unvarnished truth. Curses I may deserve, but not from you. Why, it was because I knew myself as great a perjurer as ever escaped the felon's dock, and because I dreaded being placed there, that I fled my country. Madam, your husband *was* concerned in poisoning the favorite,—that time you know of; and, maddened by losses and dreading exposure, he committed suicide, if ever a man did."

"I don't believe it!" shrieked Mrs. Appersley, who, in her horror at Otway's words, had thrust back her gray hair, till combs were loosened, and it fell in disorder about her ears.

"Ah, but you shall and must believe it!" continued Otway; "now keep quiet, and listen. As for you," he added, turning to Reuben, who had only groaned, "I am sorry for you from the bottom of my heart. But I came here armed with proofs, if I should be driven to use them."

So saying, he took a handful of papers from his breast pocket, and, in doing so, accidentally—or of intent—revealed a revolver. "The habit of the bush," he observed. "I never travel without a weapon."

"Now, this is the death-bed confession of the groom who was thick in the mischief, and which I have only obtained within the last fortnight," continued Otway. "I wanted it to clear myself from any possible accusation if that story should ever be raked up; and you have only to watch the circumstantial evidence, to see how it all fits in. I was bad enough, heaven knows, gambling and betting, and wasting money and running into debt, but I never cheated or used foul means. To be sure, I had not a virago for a wife, to taunt and goad me—"

"Oh, Mr. Otway!" pleaded Reuben.

"Well, well. This man may be living still, but his end must be very near. Here are cuttings from newspapers of the time, and my own notes of what publicly transpired.

I was Mr. Appersley's worst enemy, was I, when I blasted my whole life to save his reputation, knowing that if he were pronounced a suicide, the other black story would be sure to be believed? And so I, his doctor, who chanced to be at hand when he was found dead, swore to heart disease,—swore to a heap of lies, because I was an unprincipled fool who could only think of my friend, and grieve for his faults, and pity the little fatherless boy he loved so well. It is a simple story. I was a coward as well as a fool and a scoundrel. There was a buzz and a scandal,—a talk of taking up the body to see if poison could be found. They would have done it in later years, and so I bolted."

"Stay—stay," said Reuben, in a tone that betrayed his grief, "do not try to persuade me that this dreadful story can be true. It is so long ago, you have forgotten incidents."

"I have not forgotten one tittle," interrupted Otway; "and now your lady mother has got at the truth without going to law for it."

"You are hard upon my mother," sighed Reuben.

"Has she not been hard on me?" retorted the other; "aye, and on mine? Many old friends were faithful in adversity, and cherished my poor wife and helpless child; but Mrs. Appersley of Five Oaks was not among the number. I have ascertained that neither mother nor daughter ever crossed her threshold after I deserted them."

"I won't believe your wicked story," cried the suffering woman, the tears coursing down her wrinkled cheeks, thick sobs impeding her utterance, and every gesture belying her words.

"But you will believe it," said Otway. "I can leave all these papers behind me; I am sure they will be quite safe with you. They can be put in the muniment box along with title-deeds and other precious documents. I am not the least afraid of your bringing me to justice."

"Spare us taunts, I beseech you," cried Reuben.

"Well, well; I have said my say, and may now shake the dust from my feet,"

"It is a bitter night," said the host; "not weather in which to turn out a dog. Surely you will stay?"

"Thank you, thank you very much, but I must travel many miles before morning. Besides, Mrs. Appersley is only used to honest, respectable people—"

"If you'll stay, I'll forgive everything," moaned the lady.

"Well, that's handsome!" cried Otway, with a hard chuckling laugh, and rising as he spoke, "but I cannot stay many minutes longer, for all that."

"But you must have food,—refreshment of some sort," exclaimed Reuben.

"If breaking bread is to be a sign of peace, so be it. A biscuit will serve, and a glass of brandy-and-water may be not undesirable. Then I must be off."

George Otway quaffed the brandy-and-water as one who, without being a sot, was yet well accustomed to deep potations. When the glass was emptied, he exclaimed:

"You will not forget tonight, or be able altogether to forget me; but this side the grave we are little likely to meet again. I leave England on Monday, and chose Saturday night for my visit with a purpose. Sunday is not a good day for a chase, had anybody recognized me. Remember, I am Oldfield, the Australian doctor and trader. Be mute as I shall be, and bury the past in the decentest grave you can."

"Shake hands," murmured Mrs. Appersley, as she stretched forth trembling fingers to meet his brawny grasp.

"Good-by, good-by," he exclaimed, "and don't fret. "As your son observed just now, the trouble was long ago, and perhaps people will forget the sooner, the sooner they forgive."

"It seems but yesterday," moaned the stricken widow;

"it's all more vivid and real than things that happened last week. I forgive you everything, and I am sure you think what you have said. But I should go mad if I believed you. Now, Reuben, Reuben," she added, "you don't wish that."

And then the miserable woman fairly broke down, and flung herself among the sofa cushions in a paroxysm of weeping.

"I only make things worse," said Otway. But there was a little necessary delay in getting round the chaise, and a little earnest, low-toned talk between Otway and Reuben in the hall. And then the host made a memorandum of an address in his pocket-book, and the two shook hands.

George Otway passed out into the cold wintry night, with the snow lying white around him, a half moon sinking in the west, and bright stars shining overhead. But he knew every yard of the road over which he had to drive his hired horse.

And Reuben returned to the old parlor to comfort his mother as best he might.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE GLORY OF THE LONG PARLOR HAS DEPARTED.

IT was an hour later, and what had passed between mother and son in the interval need not be told. At last he had recommended her retiring to rest, and had summoned the old servant, Rebecca, to attend her. Then, with a step made heavy by heaviness of heart, Reuben Appersley mounted to his wife's chamber.

Catherine had not needed any assistance, and had chosen to remain in solitude. Her thoughts had been busy conjecturing the purport of George Otway's visit, and reviewing her own condition of life. She had not wept, that is, no tears had coursed down her cheeks, but if there be such a thing as inward weeping, then, for the hundredth time she had known it. Her eyes were hot and heavy, as eyes are apt to be that have been much washed by tears; and little sobs had relieved her,—sobs that grew out of involuntary sighs. Catherine knew that she had not many months to live, and though when she had first realized her danger, the blow was sharp, she was now resigned to her fate. Nay, there were times when she felt almost impatient of delay, so strong was the heart-yearning to be where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." We can understand that for wisest ends, the young, as a rule, cling tenaciously to life; and yet, when the fiat has gone forth, they are often as ready to depart as the aged. Thus wisely and pitifully was it ordered in the present instance; yet Catherine was sometimes oppressed with a sense of perplexed duties, and the consciousness of many

things to do in a short space of time. It had always been an element of her character to plan and act for the happiness of others rather than for self satisfaction, and her sufferings had but exalted her nature.

Reuben entered the room gently, and seeing that his wife was alone, closed the door immediately, as if with a sense of relief that no third person was present. But Catherine perceived at a glance that something sorrowful had happened, for latterly she had grown very learned in reading his countenance. She had been sitting by the light of the fire and of a single candle, and she rose to light a second candle on the chimney-piece.

"Not for me, not for me!" exclaimed Reuben; "I really like your shaded room. Oh, Catherine," he continued, and resting a hand on her shoulder as he spoke, "I have terrible things to tell you; can you bear them?"

"Dear Reuben," she replied, "I can bear anything it may comfort you to tell me."

"Yes; that I believe. And, besides, it is right you should know. I should be ashamed of my own falsehood and cowardice if I hid the truth from you. But oh, it is hard to utter. Catherine, guess the worst that George Otway could have to reveal, and you will have guessed the truth."

And fairly overcome, Reuben wept like a woman.

"Sit down, sit down," said Catherine, half forcing him into the easy chair she had just occupied, and then she knelt beside him, and passed her arm around his neck. "My poor dear Reuben," she murmured, "oh, that I could bear all this sorrow for you!"

"Bear it with me like a true, good wife," he murmured; "and, oh, be good to my mother, for she is sorely stricken."

"I will."

"See how wildly I talk,—quite forgetting how ill you still are, wanting all kindness yourself!"

"I am weak in body," returned Catherine, "but I think not ill in mind. It will do me good to be of use."

"No, you never were weak in mind," said Reuben. "I know that now. I recollect your wise words about the 'moss of forgetfulness.' It maddens me to think that my own folly has brought down the blow."

"But your intentions were so good! And your own life has been so blameless," cried Catherine, instinctively desiring to restore his self-respect.

"Poor mother!" sighed Reuben.

"Shall I go to her?" asked Catherine.

"No, not tonight. She is better left to Rebecca. Besides, I want to tell you all, everything the man said; I want you to think for me, and say if it really does seem true."

And now Reuben Appersley, being a little calmer, related the story which had so wounded and shamed him. And when it was told, Catherine was constrained to believe it.

"Oh, Reuben," she exclaimed, "let the 'moss of forgetfulness' grow fast again if it will. See how mercifully the truth has been shown to you, without public betrayal! Oh, Reuben, by and by you will be happy,—so much happier than you dream. People in my state of health have prevision. I know they have, and I see clearly a future of joy before you."

"A future of joy for me!" cried Reuben, in a tone of incredulity; "ah, now you are dreaming."

"No, not dreaming; only clear seeing. I think it with a feeling that is akin to certain knowledge. And in reward for my prophecy, when the happy days come, think of me a little kindly,—that is all I ask;" and Catherine kissed his cheek tenderly and calmly as a sister might.

"I do think of you kindly," said Reuben, pressing her hand, "more kindly and fondly than you seem to suppose. One great trouble drew us apart, but I feel that in a cer-

tain sort of way this other trouble brings us together again. To you only can I fly for sympathy!"

"That is right, that is right," replied Catherine. "I could have rejoiced over your happiness, though it had been quite lonely; but it would have been heart-breaking to think that you did not bring your sorrows to me. Now we quite understand each other, I know; and whatever happens, things between us will henceforth go on well."

"God bless you, Catherine!"

"I know I can be of use," she continued, "and that conviction is always a comfort. Your mother will want much attention and all the sympathy of a daughter. I shall have strength given me,—you will see."

"It has been given you already, I think," said her husband; "ah, you do not know how much you help me!"

"Then you must let me advise a little," she resumed. "Seek rest; after a night's repose, things will look clearer."

"Rest! How can I sleep!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, you will," said Catherine, and she was right. She spoke from the experience of great sorrows, and knew that they exhaust the frame so that the very weariness is an opiate. A fretful indecision about some trifling affair will banish sleep ten times more effectually than a heavy trouble, for which no remedy is apparent.

The next day Catherine was down stairs a little earlier than usual, not greatly so to attract marked attention, but still an hour or two after breakfast. If she was overtaxing her strength, the fact did not show; pay-day might come, but the excitement of having a duty to perform kept her up for the present. When she entered the old parlor, she found Mrs. Appersley in her accustomed chair, and with her work-box open beside her. But she was unemployed, her hand playing listlessly with the fringe of her apron. It was evident she had been weeping, though now her eyes were tearless; but there were twitchings about the muscles of her face, which revealed mental disturbance.

Catherine approached her husband's mother with a little more tenderness of manner than belonged to her usual morning greeting, only a little more, and yet it seemed too much; for the elder lady raised her hand with a slight gesture of impatience, saying:

"There, my dear, I know you are sorry for me. But we won't talk about all that has happened,—at least, not often. I may have occasion to speak about painful things, and then I will. It was right Reuben should tell you all that man said; it was my wish that you should know. As Reuben's wife, it was right and proper that you should be informed; don't you think so yourself?"

"It would have pained me very much to feel that I was not trusted," said Catherine; "now, at least, I can share the trouble."

"Yes, yes; but I have come to the conclusion that Mr. Otway is a little touched in his head—the poor man has had a hard life—and it is not to be expected that he should remember things which happened twenty years ago quite clearly. Have you not heard how cunning mad people are?"

"Yes, I have heard they are cunning," said Catherine; and as she looked at Mrs. Appersley, she could not help speculating as to how far the widow's mind had maintained its balance under the blow which had been inflicted on her pride, as to how far *her* words were "cunning" in the crazy sense. In the full glow of her faculties, Mrs. Appersley would not have been guilty of a subterfuge to save herself from torment. If it be true that characters have the "defects" of their high qualities, faults have, sometimes, their high attributes; and Reuben's mother was too proud to be false. But her mind was too narrow to be very strong. Perhaps her hold on general sanity was "not allowing herself to believe," and that she would have been quite crazed, had she realized Otway's revelation in the same way Reuben and Catherine understood it.



The glory of the room
But Mrs. Appersley soon d
associations as painful as a
portrait of her husband rem
she would not have remove
well became unendurable to
passed, the drawing-room p
ting-room of the family.

CHAPTER LVII.

CATHERINE LEAVES FIVE OAKS.

IT was at this juncture that some home letter, and some chit-chat talk, suggested that Jane Freeth should be invited to Five Oaks. In very truth, Catherine needed sisterly companionship more, even, than poor Mrs. Freeth required Jenny's society; and thus it came to pass that in the early days of the new year Jane arrived, as it was said, to stay a month or two with the Appersleys. But there was a quiet understanding that she was to prolong her visit, if circumstances rendered her doing so desirable.

Mrs. Appersley had heard of Jenny's engagement to Frank Raybrooke, and yet had hardly realized that the young girl had passed out of childhood. It was with a start of surprise that she recognized in the well-grown, graceful guest, the niece so often lovingly called "little Jenny."

"I wonder," she exclaimed, more than once, "I wonder no one ever told me that she was the image of Catherine. Reuben, don't you see it?"

"Yes, mother, there is a strong family likeness, certainly; and it has grown more marked lately," Reuben answered, on one occasion, "yet I think she reminds one of what poor Catherine was, rather than of what she is."

"Reuben," said his mother, "I don't like to hear you say 'poor' Catherine in that desponding way. Of course she'll get well as soon as we have spring weather, so that she may be more in the air."

"I hope so, I am sure; meanwhile, I think Jenny's visit



deeper sorrows of her eld
was ill, and had to be car
she would read to her and
services, as if rendering the
and privileges.

Then, in the evenings, she
with ear and taste, would h
fine-toned grand-piano had
gifts to his wife, and for s
Catherine "kept up" her mu
played brilliant duets togeth
Catherine's state, that the e
So that, after a little while,
Fine classical music was rath
but she sometimes liked what
them accordingly. Therefor
ransacked her music-books an
airs that would please her au

"Oh!" she exclaimed, on s
hear Miss Otway play these
them speak with expression a
them before I heard her."

"My dear," said h

And, without waiting for further encouragement, she struck some opening chords, and soon glided into the melody of Burns's song, beginning,

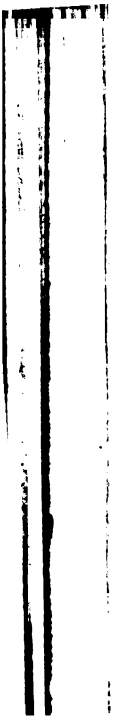
"Should auld acquaintance be forgot,"

and played for a few minutes as if herself delighted in the tones she produced.

Music and poetry, and, indeed, all art creations, are of the nature of spiritual mysteries, that appeal to the inner life in an incomprehensible manner. Certain vibrations, in a certain melodious and rhythmical order, and, lo! a melody is produced that can waken memories and wring the heart! Thus was it on the present occasion, and when Catherine looked timidly at her husband, she found him gazing at her with mournful tenderness, and she knew that he, too, was thinking of that dull wintry morning when she had striven to break her engagement.

But it was not only in connection with music that Hester's name was frequently mentioned by Jenny. She really loved her governess, who, in these latter months of sickness and sorrow, had been more than ever the friend of the whole family; and it was hardly possible for her to relate home news and give interesting details without mentioning "Miss Otway." And if the words were, "Miss Otway thought so and so," or, "said such a thing," the speech and the thought were sure to seem wise. Then, she had quite a history to tell of Hester having become independent; of having had a mysterious interview with her father, who was going back to Australia to make more money still, with a little wonderment on Jenny's part why she had been requested not to talk of the affair "out of the family."

One day, Mrs. Appersley a little surprised Reuben and Catherine by remarking: "I am quite interested in Hester Otway. I should like to see her. I wish you would invite her to stay with us."



to borrow from April, and that gl
even though we know that biting
are still in store. A day on whic
golden and amethyst cups of th
scent the shy violets and bold hya
revel in the clamor of the song-b
has awakened. Hester Otway wa
person, not given to notice omens,
conscious of a sense of satisfactio
which heralded her coming to Five

She had never understood—oth
the reason of that coolness on the
friend, which had prevented her fr
house in earlier days; but, in additi
ter was by nature very amiable a
mother was idealized in her mind,
but still absolutely. Besides, it w
by whose sick-bed she had lately w
sibly invited her, and she came, if
yet, on the whole, very pleasurable

But it soon became apparent t
taken a great liking to the girl who
to hate, but who now became

she could be, she had a keen sense of justice in all matters which came within the grasp of her understanding. Thus, to feel herself convicted of injustice was a pain and humiliation she could only soften by generous kindness now.

It was a real gratification to Catherine to find Hester becoming so great a favorite with Reuben's mother; and the circumstance threw the two sisters more and more together. As might be expected, when they were *tête-à-tête*, there was a great outpouring of her own happiness on Jenny's part, with the brightest of castle-building for the future; and never did elder sister give truer, deeper sympathy than Catherine gave now.

Much was she struck by the mental development which had taken place during the last few months. There was a maturity of thought in Jenny, allied to great simplicity, which made her companionship very sweet to Catherine. It would have made a touching picture, had limner sketched them,—the two sisters so much alike, and yet so different; both in the deep mourning still worn for the young brother, —the elder fading slowly away; the younger bearing her betrothal ring, and with the rose on her cheek growing deeper when she talked of him she loved, or opened the locket she constantly wore.

Of course they talked of many things, and of other persons besides Frank Raybrooke. Phœbe's sad marriage was a frequent theme, and Algernon, in connection with his brother, was frequently mentioned. One day Jenny exclaimed,—

"Do you know I fancy papa does not like Algernon as much as he used to do; and I am so sorry!"

Catherine was silent for a few moments; then she controlled herself, and said calmly: "Why do you think so?"

"Because, when I have been writing to Frank," replied Jenny, "and have asked papa if he has any message, he has always said, 'No, don't give any message from me; I



"Yes, I do," said her sister.

And in the silence of a wake
to a resolution. She determine
that through all the future she
Catherine had been stricken. T
solemn charge for Jane to defend h
it ever be aspersed, and Janet Gil
repeat all she knew to Jenny whe
more. Janet was beginning to r
tion, and "when I shall be gone'
often had to hear.

One of the "bits of news" th
from town, was that Hubert Freeth
up Telford House! Ever since p
Freeth had felt oppressed by the a
illness and death, and even her hu
painful memories never likely to be
house was unchanged. He was g
the suburbs, whence he could stil
day.

Now, this allusion to little Te
struck upon Catherine's unselfish

while, the doctor came daily "to watch the case," and Mr. Darwin, the vicar, called frequently, and so did his wife, and Catherine learned to estimate their worth. She wondered how she ever could have thought Mr. Darwin commonplace or awkward, for she found him eloquent when the greatest of themes had to be freely discussed, and she thanked him with the fervent gratitude such help as that he gave always elicits from the heart which has opened to receive it.

The days had lengthened; the trees were robed in their delicate green, and bright blossoms were perfuming the air when Catherine intimated that she should like to go to the sea-side. Yes, to quiet little Shinglebeach, which was so near London that Reuben and her own family could frequently see her.

"Dear Reuben," she exclaimed, "let me have my will in this, and do not fear for me at all. We can take a little house, and, with Janet to manage for me, I shall have every comfort, I am sure. You must attend to your Parliamentary duties, but I know mamma and Jane will often be with me."

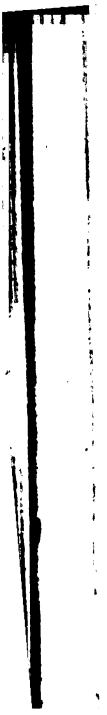
"If you are strong enough to bear the journey, the plan is good, I think," said her husband, "especially if you really like the idea, and wish it carried out so much."

"I do wish it carried out just as I say, for the reasons I gave, and some others," replied Catherine; "you know what company I always find in the sea."

"I am afraid my poor mother will miss us all," observed Reuben.

"I have thought of that," said Catherine. "I believe Jenny must return home to help mamma amid all the cares of leaving Telford House, and trouble of removing; but I am persuaded Hester Otway would stay with your mother if she were asked to do so."

"Do you really think she would?" cried Reuben; and without waiting for an answer, he added, "I'll speak to my



of running backward and forward
Parliamentary duties; so, in a few
tion above related, Catherine's plan

Catherine was visibly affected i
ben's mother, nor was Mrs. Appers
except Hester were departing, but,
become a host in herself!

Poor Floss, always mournful a
boxes and travelling preparations, w
in canine fashion, when Catherine ex

"I should so like to take Floss wi

"Oh, by all means, my dear, if y
with the dog," returned Mrs. Appers
since she has cared for any one in th

Happily, Floss, having no boxes t
her great joy at a moment's notice.

CHAPTER LVIII.

OLD AND YOUNG.

IT will be remembered that Lionel Freeth was very dear to his sister Catherine, and, notwithstanding her illness, she had corresponded with him frequently. Also, she had written sometimes to Aline Brindley, not choosing to let the "coolness" between their mothers interfere with their friendship. Aline had written affectionately in reply, but many things were happening around her which she did not dare to commit to paper. If we look in at Mrs. Brindley's residence, we may divine some of those plans and wishes which were testing her daughter's fealty to Lionel.

It was again the height of the London season, and Mrs. Brindley's little drawing-room was set out to the best advantage. Thanks to the worldly tact which had been exercised during the last few years—and notably to the improvement of opportunities while she was intimate with the Freeths—she had a considerable number of visiting acquaintances; and though she attempted very little in the way of returning hospitalities, she and Aline were really a good deal sought after. A refined, accomplished girl, with some pretensions to beauty, is usually a welcome guest, and a sprightly "woman of the world" is, in many circles, hardly less an acquisition. Thus they had been out a great deal, and Aline had been so much admired, that her mother was more certain than ever that she would be "thrown away" were she to engage herself to Lionel



Aline had intimated her intentic
room if he came. When a m
mother to his addresses, and h
submit to a young girl's rejectio
pitiable things of earth.

But though three or four o
themselves, and thus the afterno
personage hoped for by Mrs. Bri
perhaps it was the disappointmen
per, and made her impatient of c
was that when, later in the day, q
cal hours for receiving visitors, M
arrived, she found the hostess in
moods.

When Mrs. Brindley and h
alone, Mrs. Kar now often dined
with them. Aline had been giver
was some distant relation who had
in the early days of their intercou
her as the "faded woman" who h
ous letter for Hester Otway to
Brindley was aware of the circumst
admitted she should not have k

they were singularly attracted toward each other, growing more attached every day. Perhaps Mrs. Brindley would have been a little jealous of the elder lady's influence had she ever thought that it could be exercised against herself. And then there were those heavy little bags still ready to pour out gold-dust or nuggets when an extra new dress was needed, or a darling bit of point-lace. Surely there were reasons why Mrs. Kar should be always a welcome guest,—more or less.

Now this day Aline was unable to hide her distress, for Mrs. Brindley had spoken to her with unusual severity. She had been taunted with her preference for Lionel Freeth, who was declared unworthy of her regard,—a ne'er-do-weel not much better than Cuthbert Rawlins; and at this accusation her spirit had risen to defend the absent. No wonder that Mrs. Kar recognized the state of the domestic atmosphere even before Mrs. Brindley spoke to her on the subject.

But if Mrs. Brindley thought that the elder lady would aid her plans by influencing Aline, she quickly found herself mistaken. The two ladies were *tête-à-tête*, for soon after dinner, Aline, on the plea of a bad headache, had retired to her room, and Mrs. Kar had listened patiently to all the arguments her hostess had urged.

"And now, Susan," she exclaimed—and there seemed some mysterious power to soften her in the Christian name which she never used when there were listeners—"now, Susan, hear me. Believe me, I would rather die some cruel death, or worse, disclose my own life as a warning, than that the marriage you contemplate should take place. I mean what I say literally; my words are no mere figure of speech."

"Then I am sorry I spoke to you of the affair," said Mrs. Brindley; "I thought you would help me. Instead of which, you are as wrong-headed as the girl herself."



for the man is unworthy o

"Nonsense, nonsense," has been dissipated, we k Aline, that he would be a r her."

"Believe it not," cried be a wife's heart to break, deeds."

"How should you know

"How should I know? history? Why, that which I story over again, with hardl tones of the speaker there w more even than the words.

"Oh, but Aline is very di Brindley.

"Not so different as yo "In my heart of hearts I be as pure and good as she is. E hungered for love, and so, bel even, is the more desperate, b

"She shall not marry Lio ley.

my lot easier, but I want a greater boon still. It is that, for all our sakes, you will yield in this."

"I cannot."

"And yet my prophecy will come true; you will see. Meanwhile, my heart bleeds for the poor girl," continued Mrs. Kar.

"I think rather it ought to bleed for me," cried Mrs. Brindley, with asperity. "I declare you have made me quite miserable; just, too, when I wanted help and sympathy. And I think your insinuations are quite wicked; as if it were possible Aline could—could—ever forget herself as you did."

"Oh, Susan, forbear!"

"Then you should not provoke me," continued Mrs. Brindley. "Of course I am sorry if I hurt you; but you have contrived to make me wretched, that you have!" and Mrs. Brindley burst into tears. She was evidently of opinion that it was a most inhuman thing thus to wound her with the shafts of truth.

"I freely forgive your anger toward myself," said Mrs. Kar; "but will you promise to think of my words?"

"In the sense of yielding to them, certainly not," returned the hostess.

"Then we will say no more on the subject," remarked Mrs. Kar; and soon afterward she added, "It is growing late; I had better wish you good-night."

But when she arrived at her lodgings, she did not immediately seek repose; on the contrary, she paced up and down her little parlor for a considerable time, as was her habit under mental disturbance; and when, after midnight, she pressed her pillow, she slept but little. She had, however, come to a very painful resolution, which, before many hours had passed, was duly carried out. The writing a rather long letter unnerved her to the last degree, and when her trembling fingers had posted it, she almost recoiled at the recollection of her own courage.



the postman's loud rap was heard, servant delivered a letter.

It was a long letter, and when nized, the medical treatise droppe there for a considerable time. Th absorbing than the treatise had b the expression of the reader's coun ure, pain, were all called forth by simple story, simply told, and old upon to use his great influence Freeth was as devoted to Aline believed him to be. And if so, the promote their marriage. Toward occurred this passage:

"To the utmost of my ability I s But if, from unforeseen circumsta again be face to face, do not dread suffer yourself to be introduced as Kar, the obscure relation. Oh, tha of you may be permitted! Oh, t considered by the All Wise clean en and good and innocent! But I ha one of my comforting fancies—tha

paper, he wrote at the top, "Provisional; in case of sudden death." After a minute's pause, the pen flew rapidly over three pages, and the long letter was sealed, directed to his nephew, Hubert Freeth, and immediately locked up in a private drawer.

Then ringing for a servant, he wrote a few words on a slip of paper, and directed that they should be telegraphed to Cambridge the first thing in the morning. This done, he drew the letter which had so moved him from his pocket, and read it again and again; then he lighted a taper, twisted the letter into a consumable form, and placed a corner in the flame. It blazed so rapidly that he had only just time to drop the tinder-like remains into the empty fender.

And now Thomas Freeth picked up the medical treatise, and smoothed its crumpled leaves; and then from some private recess he drew forth a small bottle, and pouring a few drops of its contents into a little water, drank it off. It was a rather potent medicine, which he only took occasionally.

It was the day after Lionel Freeth had passed certain examinations with great *éclat*, that he received a telegram from his great-uncle, requesting a visit from him as speedily as possible. Now, a request from Uncle Thomas was looked upon by the Freeth family very much in the light of a royal command, and Lionel lost no time in coming to London. Accordingly, early in the afternoon he presented himself at his uncle's residence. After the ordinary greeting, and mutual inquiries with their rejoinders, the old man exclaimed,—

"Yes, I thought the examination was over, or perhaps I might have waited a day or two. But the truth is, Lionel, that at my age there is no time to be lost in setting one's worldly affairs in order. Now, there are one or two arrangements I greatly desire to see carried out; but before doing anything, I wish to ask you a few questions, and

the more frankly and explicitly you answer me, the better will it be for all parties. In the first place, do you desire to marry?"

"Were I in a position to marry," replied Lionel, hardly concealing his astonishment at his uncle's words, "it would be the first wish of my heart."

"Good. Are you positively engaged?"

"My own heart is engaged fervently and unchangeably; but I have not dared—that is, I have not thought myself justified in extorting a pledge from her I love; and yet I hope more than I fear."

"I suppose you understand each other," said the uncle, with a smile.

"I suppose we do," replied Lionel; "and if only her mother would have the same faith in me that I think she once had, all might be well. Uncle, it is delightful news to find that you wish me to marry. For, unfortunately, my father thinks there is plenty of time."

"I should like to know who the lady is," rejoined Mr. Freeth, "before I precisely say I wish you to marry. Have I ever seen her?"

"Once, I believe."

"Is it Aline Brindley?"

"Yes; oh, yes. But, uncle, how could you possibly guess?"

"That is my own affair. I may admit that I fell in love with the young lady myself,—that is, in a great-uncleish sort of way."

"Then you do admire her?" cried Lionel, his handsome face beaming with delight; "oh, I am so happy. Perhaps with you for my friend to persuade for me, I need not wait till middle age. Of course I should wish to be called to the bar, and even to have some practice, before I marry."

"Yes, that might be desirable; but I do not know that you need wait for it. This is what I have on my mind to do: I wish to purchase an estate in one of the home coun-

ties, and entail it on your father and his heirs male. Thus, by the time you are lord chief justice, or attorney-general, or something of the sort, you will probably be its owner. Now, this is not bad for an expectation; but if you marry Aline Brindley, I will give you ten thousand pounds to settle on her, and help you in other ways until you make an income."

"Uncle!" It was the only word Lionel could utter.

"Probably, under these circumstances," continued the old man, "Mrs. Brindley will not be obdurate. You had better tell your father I want to see him, and we will have things put in train. We must wait till there is a suitable estate in the market,—and an old man's life is always precarious. Still, we can make provisional arrangements, and I am sure your father would carry out my wishes, if I do not live to execute them."

"But I hope and trust that you will live many years to see the happiness you will have promoted," cried Lionel. "My dear generous uncle, do not talk despondingly of your own life. Why, I never saw you look better."

"That may be, but I am growing old, nevertheless. Now I shall dismiss you, because I want you to send your father to me today, if possible."

It would; I think, be wearisome to describe minutely certain little scenes, which the reader who takes any interest in Lionel and Aline can very well imagine. His uncle's proposal to give forty or fifty thousand pounds for an estate to be entailed on Hubert Freeth and his heirs, was as agreeable to that individual as it would be to the generality of "fathers of families;" and as Aline was really beloved more or less by all the Freeths, the estrangement having only been from her mother, Lionel's choice, so tangibly approved by Uncle Thomas, was cordially approved by his parents. "For Lionel's sake" Mrs. Freeth consented to make advances toward a reconciliation, and as the advances were simultaneous with a formal offer of mar-



And with regard to her reconcili
that, she said, was a pure unmixe
which was all owing to a silly
almost broken her heart. As for
how fond she had been of him, and
of the young people that she had k
so much better there should be
engagement while Lionel was at
knew their own minds.

And so it came to pass that, in
Brindley was again a welcome guest
treated as an intimate friend. Yes,
The spell of her influence was brok
learned to act on her own judgment
ters on which, formerly, she had t
relying on Mrs. Brindley for advice.
many happy results. The exercise o
and action had cheered her droopin
strengthened her mind. Hubert F
ment, and was delighted with it.
drawn more and more together as th
Teddy; their mutual anxiety about
Phœbe were even bonds; but in the

days from visiting her daughter, but when she presented herself, she found Mrs. Brindley charged with a budget of news.

"You don't seem half so much surprised as I expected!" exclaimed Mrs. Brindley, when she had duly related the improvement in Lionel's position and her own concession. "When you were persuading me to consent, you never could have foreseen all that has happened."

"Perhaps not exactly," replied Mrs. Kar, "and yet I felt sure that, sooner or later, you would yield. It was a conviction I had."

"Tell me," said Mrs. Brindley, after a pause, in which, apparently, she had some puzzling thought; "tell me, had you been dreaming of Aline in any remarkable way?"

"No, nothing of the sort."

"I only asked," resumed Mrs. Brindley, "because, though I never had a prophetic dream myself, I have heard of such things. Well," she continued, "you were something like a witch, that is all I can say."

I think it probable that Mrs. Brindley had henceforth increased respect for her mother's judgment.

THE LAST DAYS AT SHINGLEBEACH, AN THE SNAKE.

ONE of the pleasantest houses in selected for Catherine's sojour with folding-doors, commanded a doul front balconied windows, the wide exp always shipping in the offing; from the corn-fields and gardens stretching to t zon of a Kentish landscape. Janet Gil housekeeper as well as head nurse, and to engage the necessary servants, and v found herself established in what deser home. In it she was a sort of queen, s of every one about her to please and ser

The distance from London was so could easily come to her and return besides that, every one whom Catherine so visit her; Mrs. Freeth or Jane, and so remained with her for days together. came down frequently, but she entreate lect his Parliamentary duties; not to be

For a few weeks she was able to go out regularly in a Bath chair, and visitors who came to the little sea bathing town, rather for holiday-making than for health, often noticed the poor invalid with mild pity, and a faint, wondering lament at the early decay of one so young and fair. Generally, she was attended by two or three loving friends, and always by the faithful Floss. There was something deeply pathetic in the attachment of the old dog; something semi-human in its quiet ways, its little moaning cries, when any attempt was made to remove it from Catherine's side. Even at night it slept at her door, and would not rest elsewhere.

But the day came when Catherine ceased to go out, and she lay on a sofa near the front windows, with Floss at her feet. It was when she was in this condition that on one of her father's visits she pleaded at last successfully for her sister Phœbe. Thrice before she had urged him to forgive the marriage, and he had refused to listen. But Hubert Freeth was softened now,—he could not refuse the dying Catherine a boon so near her heart. And as he was a man who never gave or forgave in a half-hearted way, he not only saw Phœbe and received her in his house, but set about serving her husband in a substantial manner, only making it a condition that what remained of Phœbe's fortune should be settled on herself absolutely. It would appear that Cuthbert Rawlins had shown, since his marriage, more steadiness of conduct than had been expected from him, and Hubert Freeth was willing to hope that the case of his son-in-law might prove an exceptional one, and his future atone for the past.

Her success so gladdened Catherine, that it seemed really to have done her a physical good. For three or four days, every one about her—except Janet—thought her really better. But Janet knew exactly what the flickering of the flame meant. Happily, the affairs of this world were all settled. And on the day when Catherine had, for the



there, full of tender solicitude, but
Hubert Freeth had been, and Cathe
air, though the sea-breeze flutters the
terous play! Mrs. Freeth is holdi
hands, and weeping bitterly, while
the couch, attempting to administer
is there also, calm and pale, self-po
act or endure. She has just sent for
ical aid, but it is long in coming.

It is evening, but not night, for
northwest, the glow of a glorious sun
if Catherine's eyes are open, they
Everything is so still! There is only
occasional tramp on the pavement, or
road, that blends with the low rhythmi
on the beach. Flat summer waves,
they are that seem to cling lovingly
and only ebb at a supreme bidding.

Catherine's mind wandered; or wa
words the listeners were too dull to co

"The message of the sea!" she mu
I hear it now. And ONE walks there.
again, "Such peace!" and "Oh —h—

grief of weeping women. According to her wish, Catherine was buried at Shinglebeach, on the sunny side of the churchyard, in the spot she herself had selected. Tearful relatives stood round the grave, but there was an unbidden mourner among them. Floss had followed the funeral procession, for a time unheeded, and when all was over, it was only by force that she could be removed from the spot where the coffin had been lowered. And again and again the faithful creature escaped from the house to keep lonely watch at the grave.

But though buried at Shinglebeach, Catherine's funeral sermon was preached in Meadshire, by Mr. Darwin, in the little village church, in which she had so often worshipped. The pulpit was hung with black for the occasion, and nearly all the congregation wore some sort of mourning. A tablet in memory of "Catherine, wife of Reuben Appersley, Esq.," has also been placed just above the family pew.

Reuben rallied from his loss in due time, as was to be expected from a young man of only seven or eight and twenty; and though his mother really felt her daughter-in-law's death nearly as much as probably she was now capable of feeling anything, she consoled herself greatly with the society of Hester Otway.

Jane Freeth asked one favor of her sister's husband, and that was that she might be permitted to keep Floss. It seemed a trifling boon in requital of her devotion, and was readily granted. But Jenny's sisterly duties were not quite ended. On her—assisted by Janet Gillespie—devolved a task, always mournful, and sometimes almost terrible,—the examination and distribution of the personal belongings of the dead. It was found, however, less trying than had been expected, and not at all troublesome. Catherine had taken few valuables to Shinglebeach, and when her wardrobe at Five Oaks was opened, rich dresses and other costly articles of apparel were found arranged in a certain order which facilitated removal. A number of little trinkets were

When the casket was brought t
greatly moved, but he struggled ag
emotion, and said, with tolerable cal
characteristic of her generous nature,
selfish woman I ever knew."

It has been told that Phœbe had be
clandestine marriage, and for a little
she was to prove an exception to com
her life would open out into something
than might have been expected. Und
Rawlins was devotedly attached to hi
quently, to be a good husband, in the c
of the words, was not very difficult. I
home, that he really had not much te
money in dissipation. Recently, too, P
him with a little son, and he was beginn
nity of the paternal character, and th
respectability. But there is a Nemesi
that never sleeps so soundly that stirrin
not awake her; and such a Nemesis ca
bert and Phœbe in the very ugly shape
The woman in her need had often

entreated assistance, she was told, not unkindly, but still with firmness, that they really could not do anything more for her.

"And you won't," exclaimed the woman, "not if I tell you the real truth what it is I want it for?"

"We cannot," said Phœbe, hushing and trying to quiet her baby, that had seemed frightened at Burton's voice; "but you can tell us anything you like. Cuthbert, dear," she added, turning to Rawlins, "do ring the bell for nurse, she must have done her supper,—baby is frightened of Burton."

"Frightened, is it?" shrieked the woman, as if her wrath was rising. "I shouldn't wonder if it hadn't good cause. Now look here, you had better lend me the ten pounds I want; you had indeed. I tell you for your good."

"Don't be insolent, Mrs. Burton," said Rawlins; "and I advise you not to threaten, or I shall turn you out of the house."

"And would you talk to me in that way," exclaimed Burton, "after all that I have done for you both?"

At this moment the nurse fetched away baby, and Phœbe had a moment's time to ponder on what Burton "had done for them."

"What is your trouble now?" she said, in a tone that was a little kindly.

"I want money," exclaimed Burton, "to pay the lawyers to get somebody I am fond of out of trouble; that's why I want ten pounds."

"To get somebody you are fond of out of trouble! I don't quite understand," said Phœbe.

"Don't you? Then you are a greater innocent than I thought," cried the woman. "Now, do you suppose," she continued, "that nobody is to take a liking, to anybody, and be ready to go through fire and water for him, but yourself?"

firmness; "besides, the man is not your

"No, I'm not married, but maybe m
Oh, to think of what I have done for y
"and you so comfortable and happy,—it
one's heart."

"I'm sorry if our happiness breaks
Phœbe; "and as for what you did in he
were married, I think you have been pret

"You do, do you?"

"Yes, I do," reiterated Phœbe, "a
must have been very extravagant to sp
ings."

"Maybe I have lent instead of spen
have done if Mr. Rawlins had asked you."

"Really you must go," said Rawlins;
such rudeness. Phœbe, my love," he
upstairs."

"Not just yet, if you please," plead
sudden calmness; "I have one little remar
Mrs. Rawlins. Your precious husband w
thought of you if it had not been for you

"It is false, false!" cried Phœbe; but sh
as she added, "Oh, Cuthbert, silence her

"You are horribly wicked, Burton, to say such things," sobbed Phœbe; "Mr. Rawlins never heard of my fortune till the day we were married,—it was the greatest surprise to him."

"No, it wasn't, for I had told him all about it months before. I had heard of it from your godmother's own maid. And now I will wish you a very good night."

So saying, and making a mock courtesy, Hannah Burton left the house, and passed into the gas-lighted street in a somewhat seething state of mind. Hardly, however, had she walked ten paces, when she was touched on the shoulder by a surer hand than that of Cuthbert Rawlins. She was apprehended by a detective, and accused of being concerned in a case of forgery and embezzlement, the principal actor in which was already in custody.

At the next session of the Central Criminal Court, both culprits were tried and convicted; the male prisoner being sentenced to seven years penal servitude, the woman to three years of the same punishment. And thus exit Hannah Burton from our pages!

But the words she had spoken were never forgotten. It was in vain that Cuthbert Rawlins denied, prevaricated, explained away, there was always a residuum of truth to embitter Phœbe, and destroy her confidence in him. The sweet dream that she had been loved wholly and solely for herself was dissipated forever, and in the recoil of her feelings she did her husband less than justice with regard to his present affection. The result was, that his home became less attractive than formerly, and had less of his presence. In after years Phœbe was glad to throw herself on the sympathy of her own family in many a trial which came to her, bitterly repenting her girlish duplicity and clandestine marriage.

IN seasons of sorrow, we are apt t
that require action, and to cha
which are, in reality, blessings. Cath
place only a few weeks before the time
quishing Telford House, and Mrs. Free
necessity for exerting herself, which the
ily entailed. But the necessity was ben
it roused her from the depressing woe
only deepened.

The new home was a pleasant comm
of the western suburbs. It was an old
vated, with many rooms on a floor, and
with shallow steps. And these were no
to poor Mrs. Freeth, whose failure of sight
eclipse." This great affliction she had
ter days with still increasing patience, of
thankfulness for the long years of ser
rendered in the by-gone time when she h
much. She had taken a great liking to
felt that if sight might be spared to k
well, it was just the home to help her.

parents; and they knew her devotion too well to doubt her anguish. But it was good for her, also, to have employment, and she found it, though with light duties, when she was again installed in the nursery, little Lucy being now her sole charge. Janet was a great comfort to Mrs. Freeth, and managed to relieve her very much of household cares. But the old nurse was never a very robust woman, and Catherine's death seemed to age her ten years. It is understood that whenever she dies, she is to be buried at Shinglebeach.

Trouble told also on Hubert Freeth. His hair grew suddenly very white, he began to stoop a little, and tell-tale lines showed themselves about the mouth and eyes. He, however, maintained good health, and relaxed but little in the fulfilment of professional duties, until the time came when Gilbert was an efficient assistant. But Hubert Freeth cared less for what is called "society" than heretofore, and often spent quiet evenings at home with his Bessie,—not unfrequently reading to her, and simplifying abstruse subjects, as in the old days.

And as the seasons rolled by, time did his kindly work. It became possible to talk of approaching weddings, and to contemplate Mrs. Freeth wearing a silver gray satin dress, instead of her heavy black.

Frank Raybrooke's ship had been round the world, and he, when first lieutenant, thought it high time he should be married. Sir Algernon had been recalled to England by the demise of old Lady Raybrooke, business tending to enrich him accruing therefrom, and he also urged that the wedding should not be needlessly delayed. He, however, was not quite so much at the Freeths as he had been formerly.

It is more than a year since Catherine's death, and a clamor of wedding bells proclaims the double marriage which has taken place in the Freeth family. Lionel Freeth and Aline Brindley, and Frank Raybrooke and Jane

recently become engaged to Hester Ot
felt a little awkwardness in either an
ing the circumstance on such an occasi

Those two marriages have realized t
tions entertained concerning them. In
has been one of "mutual help and co
make husband and wife alike doubly bra
strong in doing the right and eschewin
trials and temptations which no huma
escape. There is one special trouble of t
long-protracted separations from her husl
has not yet grown reconciled to what sh
his desertion. I am afraid she has her s
of his ship. Frank is post-captain now, a

But his brother is always on the look
ligence, and many a pleasant piece of n
means to send Jenny half a day before ot
have received it.

Algernon often sees his old friend, I
who has been for some years a widow, and
the loss of her husband. Indeed, it may
non is like a son to her, if the relation

periment to do it justice, and was unwilling to add another crude volume to the number already produced on the subject. "What is a single year," he observed, "for the study of a great nation!"

Algernon is a very busy man; he has found his "work" at home, and set about "doing it;" and occupation agrees with him and makes him happy.

One day, when he was talking with Lady Hartrington, mixing up old memories with present realities, he said,—

"Ah, I have altered a good many of my opinions. You remember how I used to hate 'Mrs. Grundy!' Now I am her humble servant. You would admire the good advice I gave to Frank and Jane, and how I persuade them always to set an easy chair for Mrs. Grundy. I do it myself too, I assure you."

"I am heartily glad to hear it," cried his friend, now a venerable old lady.

"Yes; I knew you would be glad that I had gained a little wisdom; that is why I told you."

"Algernon," said Lady Hartrington, after a slight pause, "I wish you would marry."

"Nay, dear friend, for once you ask me to do too much," he replied, with emotion; "it would be rank infidelity."

"To an idea," observed Lady Hartrington.

"Never mind. Some ideas are more to us than any tangible realities. My love has taught me life, and something higher; I could not be inconstant to it, even if I tried. I suppose you know," he added, after awhile, "that Appersley married again."

"Yes, I heard so."

"Ah, well, I was not sure; he is so out of your set. I remember the present wife very well, and have a strong impression that they are excessively happy. But, dear Lady Hartrington," he continued, "though I talk so wisely of Mrs. Grundy now, I do not believe I should have appre-



memory of my life," cried he; "that but I can only do so to you, therefore

Lady Hartrington never told him had been done, for the knowledge wou life. She never hinted even that she h first sparks which might have led to and blackens a fair fame. Either Alge Catherine had been marked enough t else the slander, which had really been ness and death, had found some vent, ri from a lower stratum of society. But had been indignant at the first word "her dear friend Mrs. Appersley," and brooke, whom she had known from a shameful, that it was, that such thing The two families were about to be allied it was most natural they should be intin some one observed, "Yes, but Sir Alg were long before his brother thought of Hartrington had retorted, "I beg your p spoke of his attachment ages before the Yes, Lady Hartrington had "stamped" doing so was one of her many silent known to those th

pants. Among them is a little maiden, who, from her baby days, has been the delight of Algernon Raybrooke; and there is something in this child, Catherine's kin as well as his, that makes it a central object for all loving thoughts to gather round. As Victor Hugo says, "The heart must have a bone to gnaw."

Algernon was no worse senator and politician because he often unbent to play merrily with a little child. Of course, with the discernment of childhood, little Kate knew that she was beloved, and loved warmly in return. No wonder! Was there not always in that breast pocket, to which her little fingers had been taught the way, some good gift, ranging through all manner of varieties, from a string of pearls to a box of sugar-plums. Bribery and corruption was it? Ah, love is always bought; there is always a reason for loving, if we could but see it. Love for love is the purest barter; but there is a traffic on the way to that happy interchange, in which there is much transfer of meaner commodities.

One day the two were alone, the little prattler on Algernon's knee.

"Whose name have you got?" asked Algernon softly.

"Aunt Casserine's," lisped the child.

"Who loves you?" with a hug.

"Uncle Alzernon."

"Will you go to Raybrooke and be his little girl?"

"E-es."

"And leave mamma and papa?"

"Take 'em too."

"No; they are too big."

"Den," after a pause, "den ou stay here."

And he did "stay" a considerable portion of every year.

It is mighty pleasant to have the comforts of a home without any of its cares, and such Algernon Raybrooke found in his brother's house. There was a room always

dog. Jenny gladly consented, addin
her with any one but you."

"You may safely trust her with
and, as if the dog knew what was
head on his knee, and licked his caress

Floss travelled to Raybrooke Park
of a first-class passenger, but there
difficulties about the return journey;
plausible reason why she must still rem
to pass that Floss died at Raybrooke, an
park. There was even a little monum
memory. The pedestal is inscribed w
"Fidelity," cut in the hard stone, and
the figure of a dog. The monument is n
piece of sculpture, that it is a pity it is so
the dog's grave is in a secluded spot, a
any main avenue, and in the summer m
foliage of the trees.

Old Thomas Freeth lived to see his
carried out to the letter, and to hear gol
rising young barrister, his great-nephew
years after Lionel's marriage, the old m
in his bed, from natural causes the doct
there was some

Hubert Freeth was his uncle's sole executor, and he and his children inherited the bulk of the old man's fortune. There was a legacy of remembrance to his niece, Mrs. Appersley, and some liberal bequests to charities; all the rest of his property came to the Freeths.

Among his effects was found the miniature portrait of a very lovely woman. The by-gone fashion of the dress revealed that it belonged to the period of his own early manhood, but the likeness to Lionel's wife was so striking, that no one who knew her failed to recognize it. It was a little remarkable that the miniature bore signs of some ineffectual attempt to remove it from its case; probably the old man had intended to destroy it.

And now, for once, the shrewd Hubert Freeth was mystified, and in a great measure mistaken.

"Depend upon it," he said to his wife, "depend upon it, Aline's accidental likeness to some one my poor old uncle loved in early life was the reason he took such a fancy to her, and did so much for Lionel."

"But did you never hear of any attachment?" asked Mrs. Freeth.

"Never," replied her husband. "We all often wondered that he did not marry, but never suspected that he had been in love. Finally, the family decided that he was not a marrying man."

When, through Jane, Algernon heard of the mysterious miniature, he remembered the shock of surprise the old man had evinced on first meeting Mrs. Brindley and her daughter. But he was silent. If his own unhappy love had made him learned in the mysteries of the heart, it had also taught him pity and reverence for the unspoken griefs of others.

Because the miniature portrait was really a fine likeness of Aline, it was given to Lionel, who valued it not only on that account, but with a very sacred tenderness in memory of his benefactor. Only to very choice friends did he

"Yes," replied Mrs. Kar, "very
dress exactly like the one painted."

"And did you wear the same fun
forehead?" asked Aline.

"Yes; in those days we all wore
ner."

"Very disfiguring and disguising
then he added, "and yet the beauty
How I wonder who she was! Perhaps

"Perhaps not," said Mrs. Kar.
obscure old woman, living somewhere
surface of the earth."

"Well, it is impossible for me to
strange pity for poor old uncle if he real
ment of the heart."

And now, for a brief space, we mu
Oaks. Old Mrs. Appersley lived to see
even to make some attempt to keep th
order. But she had grown so fond of I
very lenient to her shortcomings with
The long parlor has been made a nu
rocking-horse and a girl's doll-house

that she had loved Reuben in her girlhood with such a first, constant, and only love, that when he married Catherine she had resolved to remain single for life. The story was so sweet that he won her to tell it him over and over again. He has very much altered his opinions about a man's wooing, and rather admires a woman who has strength of character to stand out bravely, either in obstinate denial of a suitor, or in defending the object of her choice.

When Mrs. Appersley died—the gold cup was not forthcoming—there was some reason to believe that certain battered pieces of gold, sent anonymously as a donation to a reformatory, and acknowledged by a public advertisement, were the mutilated remains of the once much-prized trophy.

Quite lately, Reuben Appersley and Algernon Raybrooke have been found voting on the same side in the House of Commons. Of course, the question was not a strongly party one, but they voted on the winning side, and, meeting in the lobby, shook hands very cordially.

More recently still, at a time when Captain Raybrooke was abroad, Algernon visited his brother's wife one morning, evidently in a state of high satisfaction.

"Jenny, I have something very pleasant to tell you," he exclaimed. "Frank is gazetted a C.B."

"Sooner—sooner than he expected," cried the young wife, her face radiant with pleasure. "Oh, I am so glad!"

"And no doubt the K. will follow in due time," continued Algernon. And he added, after a little pause, "It is a weary thing to wait for dead men's shoes. I confess, Jenny, I should like to hear you called by a title, and to know that you had it by your husband's winning, instead of having to wait till my death for the distinction."

The intelligence of honor conferred on her husband had naturally touched her; but, knowing all she knew, there was something pathetic in Algernon's emphasis on the words, "hear you." The tears sprang to her eyes.

gayly, "Now, if you like to put o
walk down the green lanes, and give
news."

THE END.

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